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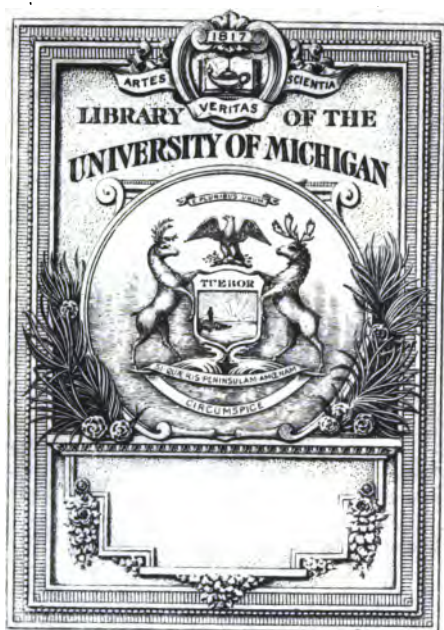
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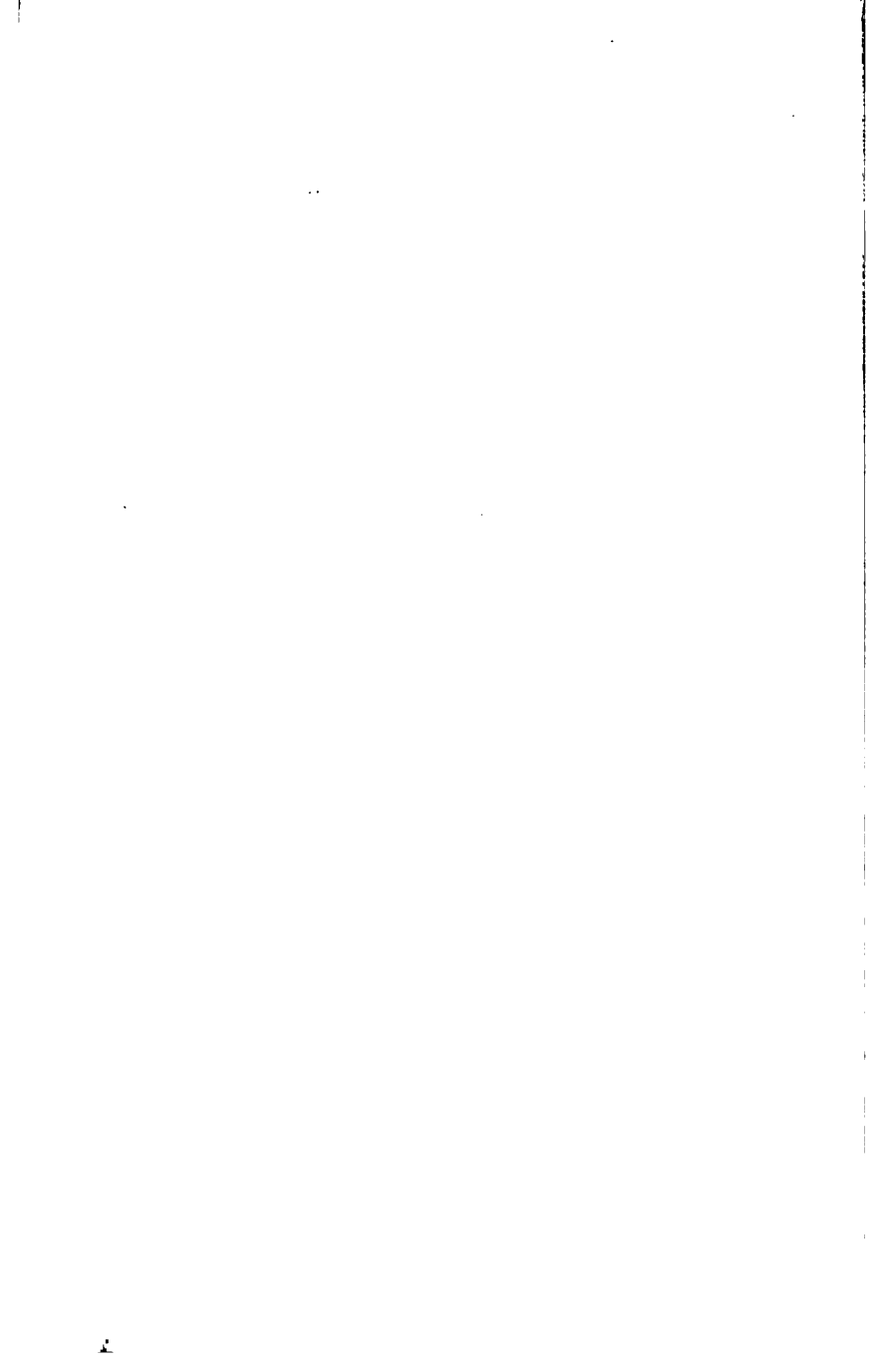
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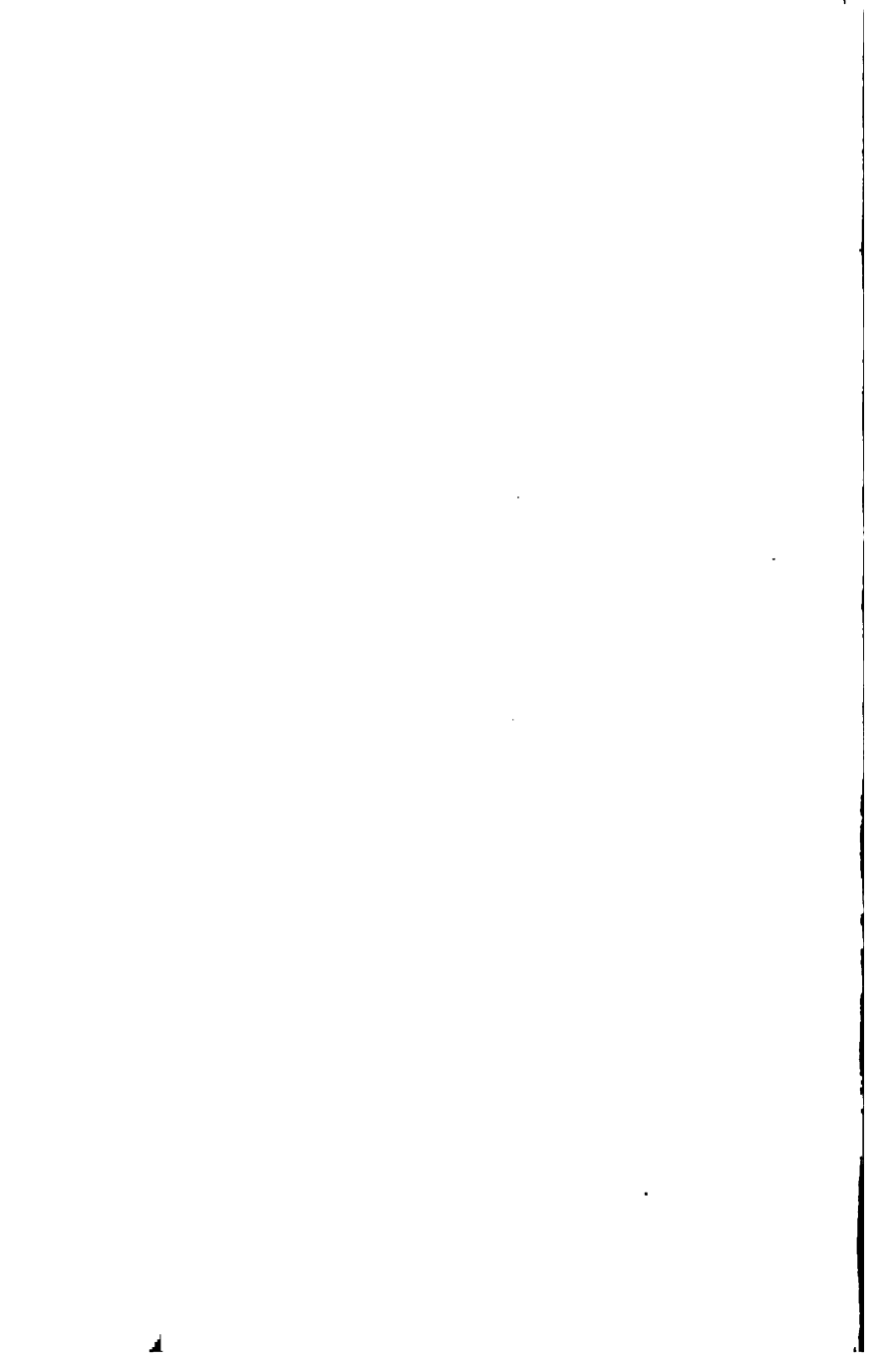




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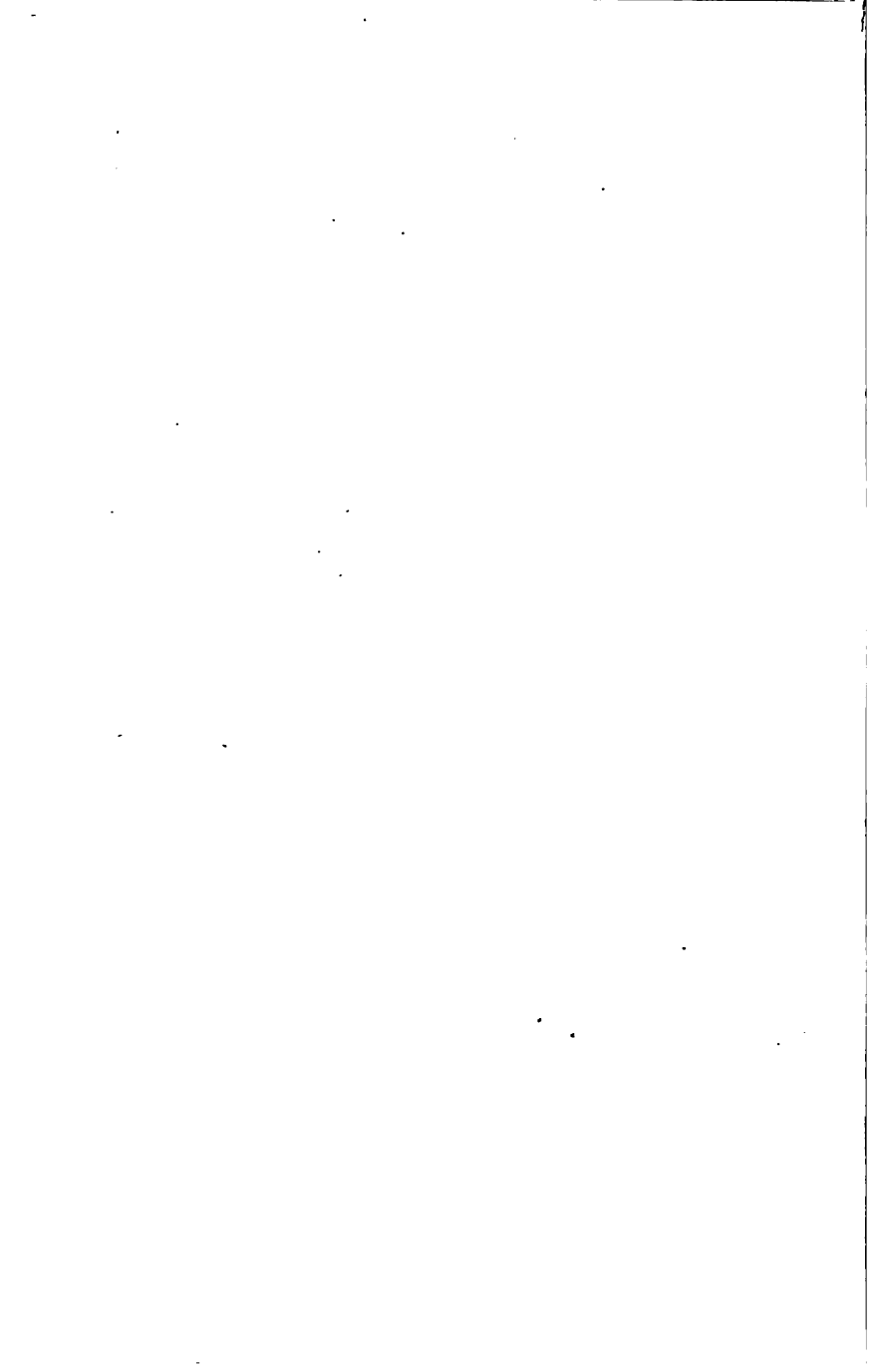
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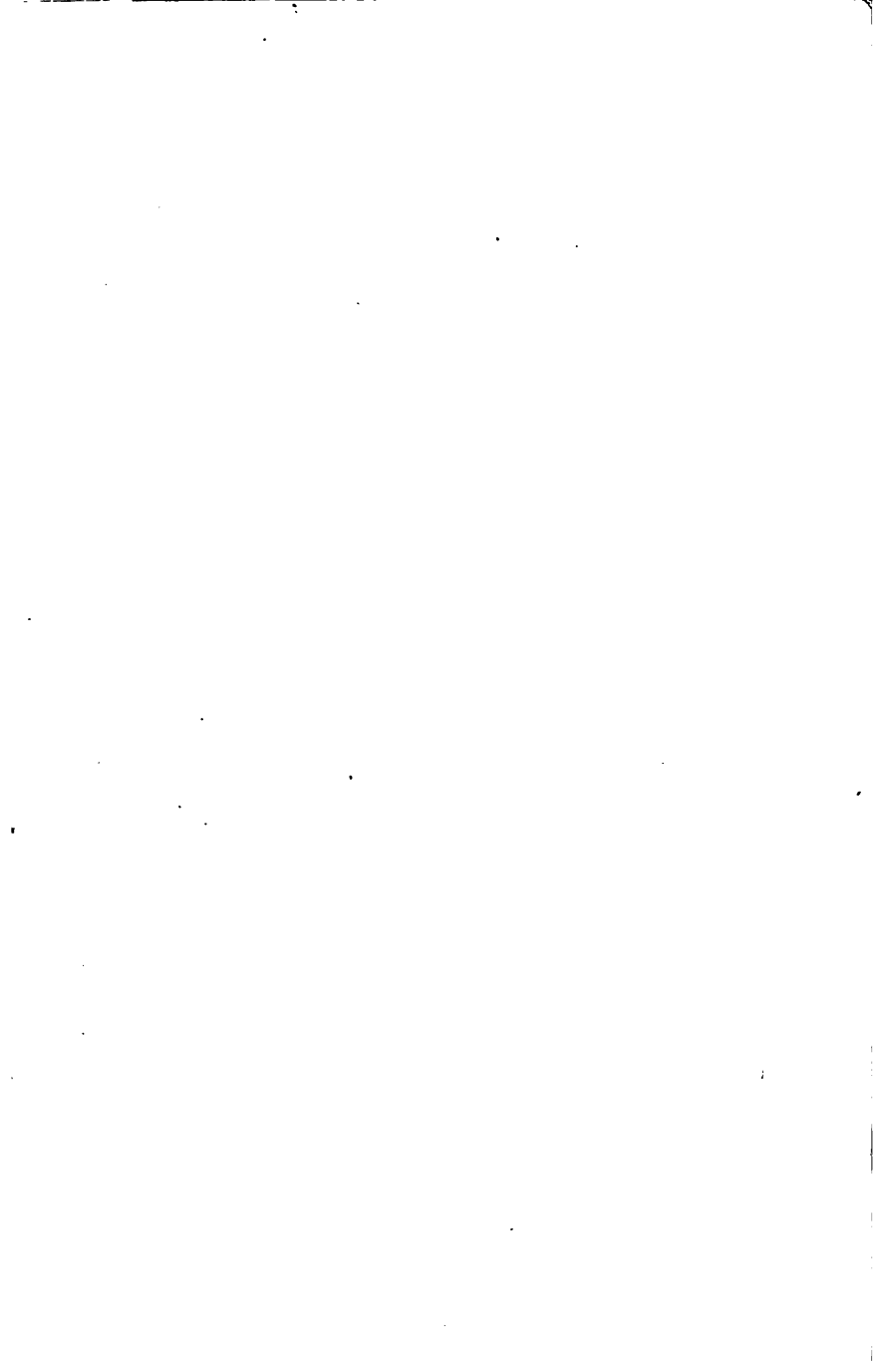
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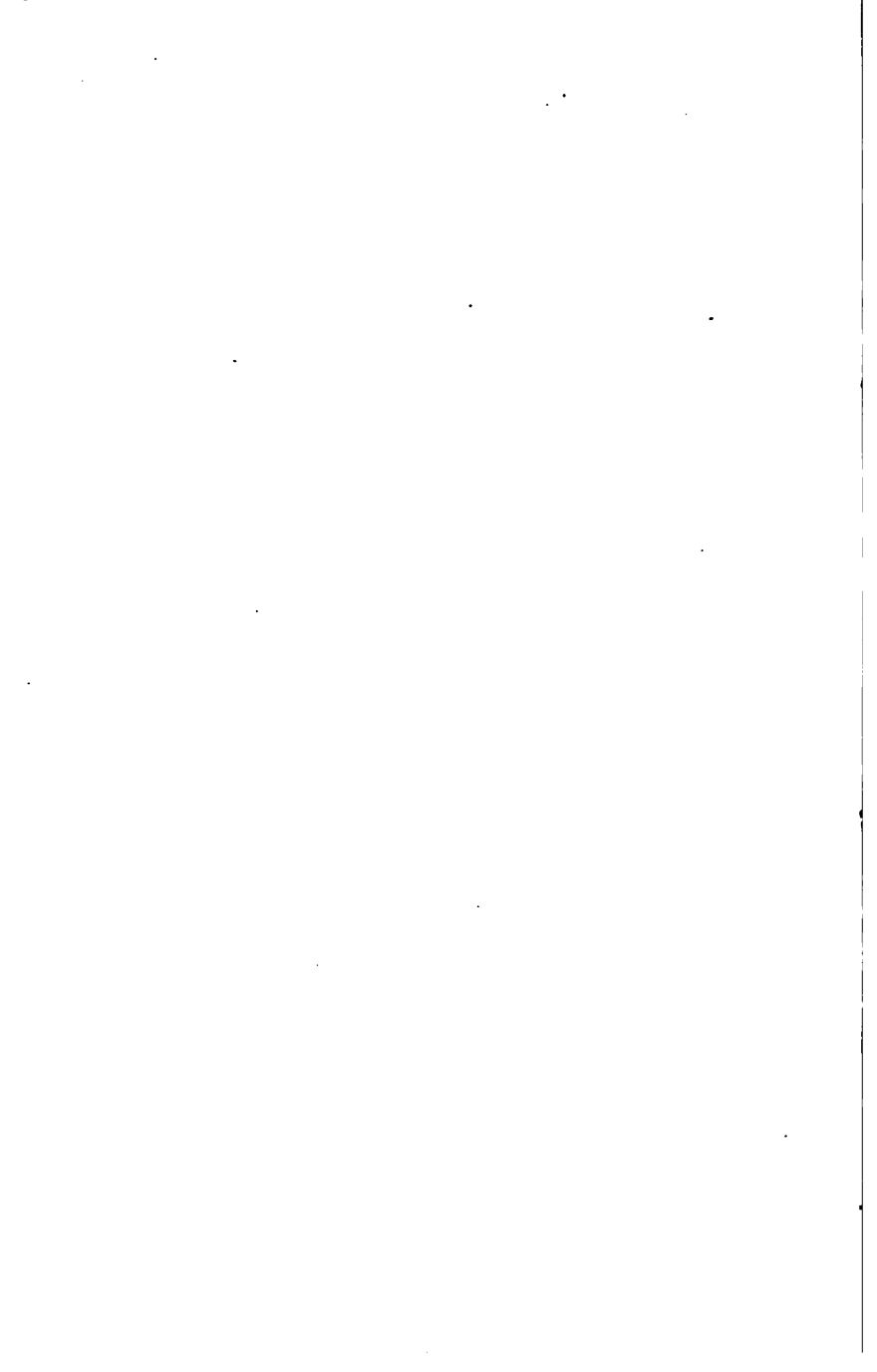
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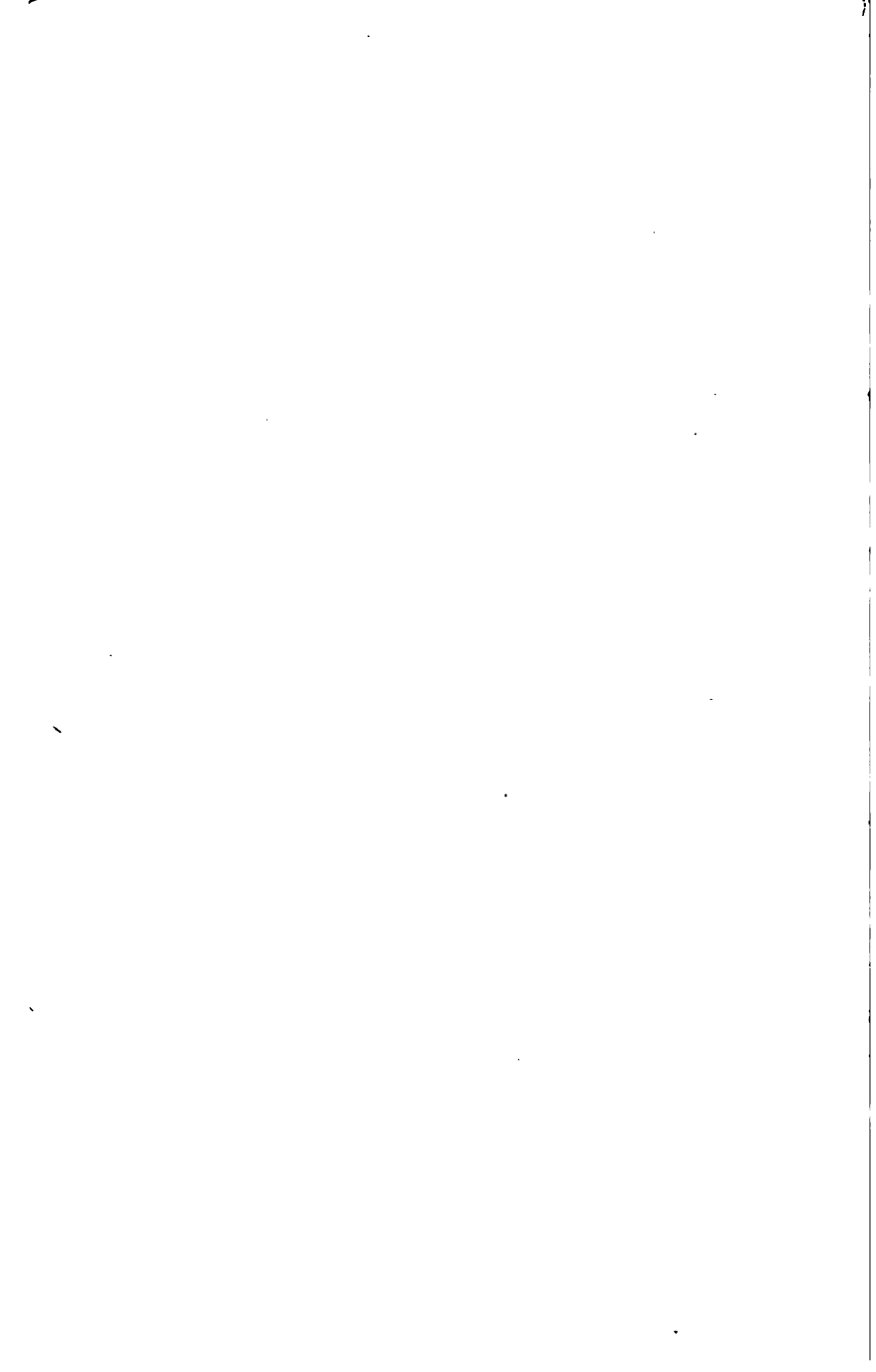






BARBARINE

AND OTHER COMEDIES



BARBERINE

AND OTHER COMEDIES

By ALFRED DE MUSSET

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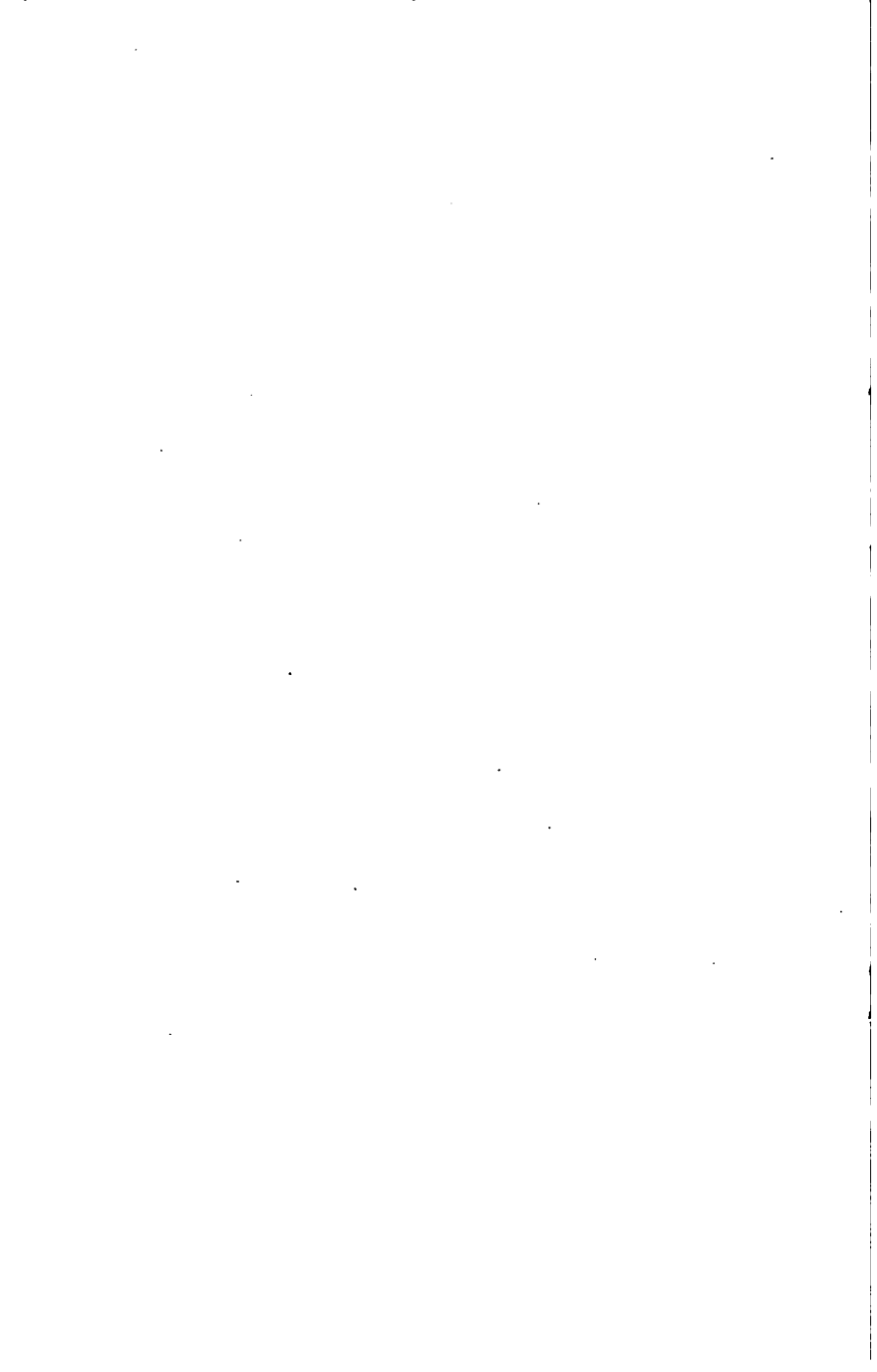
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BARBERINE
COMEDY IN THREE ACTS
(1835)



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

BEATRIX OF ARAGON—*Queen of Hungary.*

COUNT ULRIC—*A Bohemian Nobleman.*

ASTOLPHE DE ROSEMBERG—*A Young Hungarian Baron.*

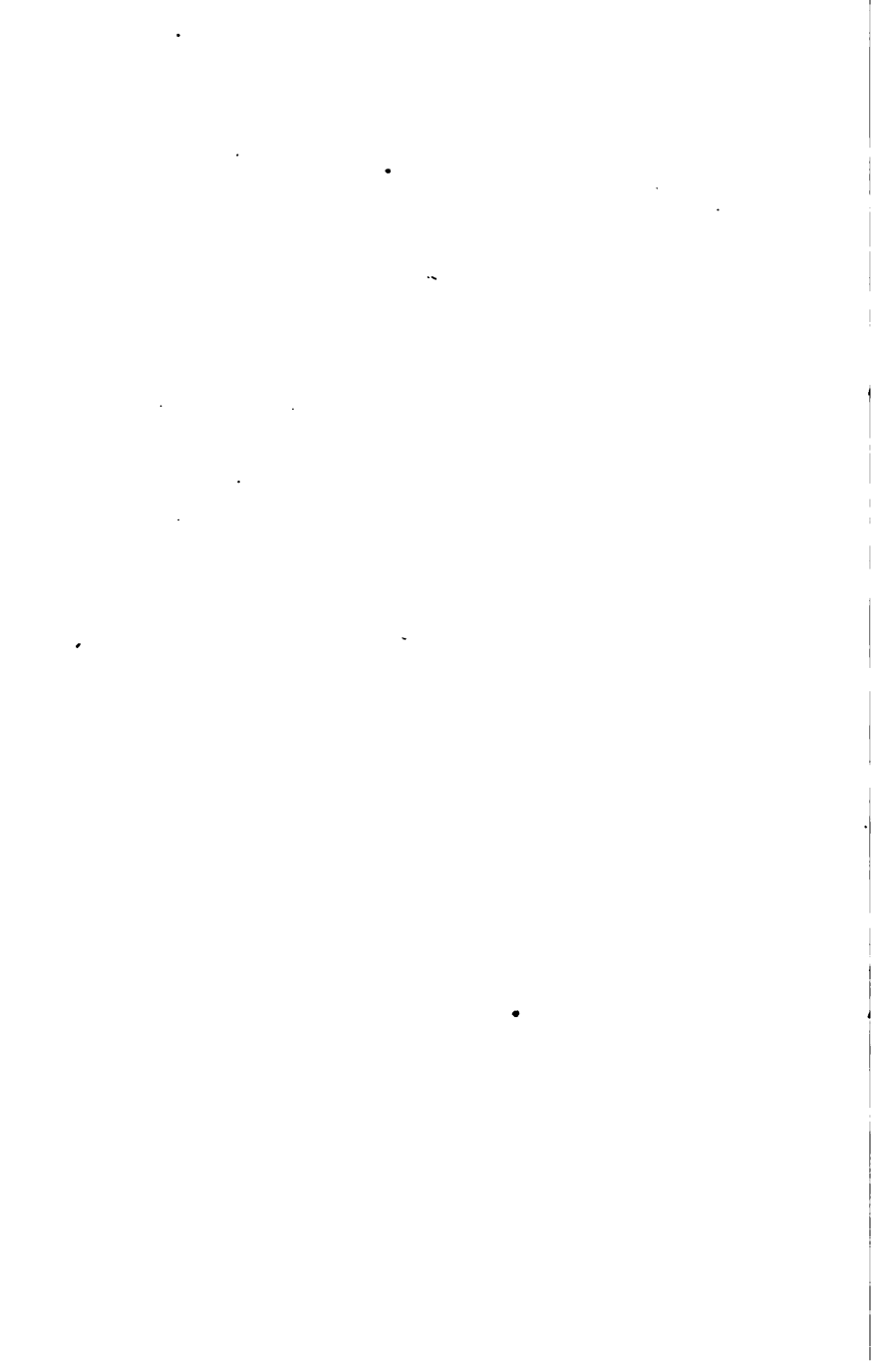
CHEVALIER ULADISLAS—*Chevalier of Fortune.*

POLACCO—*A Pedlar.*

BARBERINE—*Wife to Ulric.*

KALEKAIRI—*A Young Turkish Attendant*
Courtiers, etc.

The Scene is Laid in Hungary.



BARBERINE

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

ACT THE FIRST

SCENE I—*Rosemberg. The Host.*

[*A road in front of a hostelry. In the background a Gothic castle, among the mountains.*]

Ros. What! no lodging for me! no stable for my horses!—a barn! a miserable barn!

Host. I am extremely sorry, sir.

Ros. Who are you speaking to, pray?

Host. Pardon me, my gay young lord. If it only lay with my inclination, the whole of my poor house should be heartily at your service. But you are not unaware that this hostelry is on the road to Albe Royale, the august abode of our kings, where from time immemorial they have been crowned and buried.

Ros. I know that well, since I am bound thither.

Host. Gracious heavens! you are for the wars?

Ros. Address your questions to my grooms, and see to giving me the best room in your rascally hovel, and that without more ado.

Host. Oh! my lord, that is impossible. On the first floor there are four Moravian barons, on the second, a lady from Transylvania, and on the third, in a little room, a Bohemian count, my lord, with his wife, a great beauty.

Ros. Turn them out.

Host. Ah! my dear lord, you would not wish to be the cause of a poor man's ruin? Since we have been at war with the Turks, if you only knew the numbers of people that pass through here!

Ros. Well, what do these folk matter to me? Tell them I am called Astolphe de Rosemberg.

Host. That may very likely be so, my lord, but that is no reason——

Ros. You would play at impertinence, I presume. If once I raise my whip——

Host. It is not the action of a man of quality to maltreat decent folk.

Ros. [*threatening him*]. Ah! you would chop logic? I will teach you——

SCENE II

[*The same. Several valets run up. The Chevalier Uladislas comes out of the inn.*]

Chev. [*on the doorstep*]. What is this, gentlemen? Why, what is the matter?

Host. I take you to witness, Sir Knight. This young lord is picking a quarrel with me because my hostelry is full.

Ros. I pick a quarrel with you, boor! Quarrel with a fellow of your sort?

Host. A fellow, sir, of whatever sort he be, has always a sort of a back, and if any one comes and administers a sort of a cut with a stick to him——

Chev. [*advancing to the Host*]. Never vex yourself; don't be frightened; I will set things to rights. [*To Rosenberg*]. My lord, I give you greeting. You are going to the court of Hungary?

[*Host and valets retire*].

Ros. Yes, Chevalier; it is my first appearance, and I am in haste to get there.

Chev. And you complain, as I gather, of finding the road blocked?

Ros. Certainly that does not please me.

Chev. It is true that this little affair with the unbelievers, which we have on hand, is drawing a monstrous great wave of people to the court. There are few men of spirit who don't want to have a hand in it, and I myself have taken a part. This is what renders us difficult of approach.

Ros. Oh, as for that, indeed! I did not mean to stop long in this hotel. It was the rogue's tone that irritated me.

Chev. If that be so, Lord——

Ros. Rosenberg.

Chev. Lord Rosenberg, I am called the Chevalier Uladislas. It is not for me to sound my own praises, but the least acquaintance with what is passing in our armies must make my name familiar to you. Yours is not strange to me. I have met Rosembergs at Baden.

[*Rosemberg bows*]. So if you are only passing through here——

Ros. Yes. Only stopping for breakfast and to rest my horses.

Chev. I was at table, and eating an excellent fish from Lake Balaton, when the sound of your voice reached my ears. If you are not afraid of the neighborhood of my men-at-arms, and an old soldier's company, I bid you heartily welcome to a place at our meal.

Ros. I gladly accept your offer and count myself highly honored.

Chev. Pray step in then, I beg of you. A good dish done to a turn is like a pretty woman; it won't wait.

Ros. I know that very well. Plague on it, talking of pretty women—[*Enter Ulric and Barberine by another door of the inn*]*—it seems to me there is one——*

Chev. You have not bad taste, young man.

Ros. Without being blind—— Do you know her?

Chev. Do I know her? Assuredly. She is the wife of a Bohemian nobleman. Come along and you shall hear all about it.

SCENE III

Ulric. *Barberine leaning on his arm.*

Barb. So I must leave you here.

Ulric. For a short while. I will soon come back.

Barb. So I must let you go, and return to that old chateau, where it is so lonely waiting for you.

Ulric. I am going to see your uncle, dear. Why so sad to-day?

Barb. It is you should answer that. You will be back soon, you say. If that is so I am not sad. But are you not sad yourself?

Ulric. When the sky is heavy like this, with rain and fog, I never know what to do with myself.

Barb. My dear lord, I beg a favor of you.

Ulric. What a winter is preparing for us! What roads, what weather! Nature huddles herself together, shivering as if all living things were going to die.

Barb. I entreat you in the first place, to listen to me, and in the second place, to grant me a favor.

Ulric. What would you have, my life? Forgive me. I don't know what is the matter with me to-day.

Barb. Nor I either: I don't know what is the matter with you; and the favor you shall do me, *Ulric*, is to tell your wife what it is.

Ulric. Why, good heavens! I have nothing to tell—no secret.

Barb. I am not a Portia: I will not give myself so much as a pin prick to prove that I am courageous. But you are not a Brutus either, and you have no desire to kill our good king, Mathias Corvin. Listen, we will not have any big words or protestations; I shall not need to fall on my knees. You have a grief. Come close to me; here is my hand; it is the right road to my heart, and your heart will come hither if I call it.

Ulric. As simple as has been your question,

so shall my answer be. Your father was not rich; mine was, but he dissipated his property. Here is the pair of us, married very young; and we are owners of great titles, and very little else. I vex myself because I have not the means to make you rich and happy, as God made you kind and fair. Our income is so petty; and yet I will not increase it by letting our tenants suffer. They shall never pay in my lifetime more than they paid to my father. I think of taking service under the king and going to court.

Barb. And indeed it is a good plan. The king never failed to receive a nobleman of merit with favor; and a man like you has never long to wait for fortune.

Ulric. That is true; but if I go I must leave you here; for, in order to have this house, where we are so hard put to it to live, one must be sure of the means to live elsewhere, and I can not make up my mind to leave you alone.

Barb. Why?

Ulric. You ask me why, and yet what are you doing now? Have you not just dragged from me a secret that I had resolved to keep hidden; and what did you need for that? A smile.

Barb. You are jealous!

Ulric. No, love, but you are fair! What will you do if I go away? Will not all the nobles of the country around come prowling along the roads? And as for me, chasing a shadow far, so far away, shall I not lose my sleep? Ah, Barberine, out of sight out of mind.

Barb. Listen. God is my witness that I would content myself all my life with the old chateau and the little land we have, if it were

your pleasure to live there with me. I rise, I go to the kitchen, to the poultry-yard, I get your dinner ready, I go with you to church, I read a page to you, I sew a thread or two, and so fall asleep contented on your heart.

Ulric. Angel that you are.

Barb. I am not an angel, but an angel woman. That is to say, if I had a pair of horses we would drive to church behind them. I should not be sorry if my cap had gold trimming, if my skirts were longer, and if that made the neighbors furious. I assure you that nothing makes us women so buoyant as a dozen ells of velvet trailing at our heels.

Ulric. Well then?

Barb. Well then? King Mathias can not fail to receive you well, nor you to make your fortune at his court. I advise you to go there. If—If I can not follow you—well! as I gave you my hand a moment ago to ask you for the secret of your heart, so, Ulric, again I give it you, and I swear that I will be faithful to you.

Ulric. Here is mine.

Barb. It is only one who loves that can know how much he is loved. Bid them saddle your horse. Go by yourself, and as often as you doubt your wife, think that your wife is sitting at your door, that she is watching the road, and not doubting you. Come, my friend Ludwig is waiting for us.

SCENE IV.

The Chevalier. Rosemberg.

Ros. I know nothing pleasanter after a good

breakfast than witty company in the open air and a free discussion on women in the proper tone.

Chev. You have an introduction to the Queen?

Ros. Yes, I hope for a good reception.

[*They sit down.*]

Chev. Do not doubt of success and you will have it. During the last war we waged against the Turks under the Voivode of Transylvania, one evening, in a deep forest, I met a girl who had lost her way.

Ros. What was the name of the forest?

Chev. It was a certain forest on the banks of the Caspian Sea.

Ros. I don't know it, even in books.

Chev. This poor girl was attacked by three brigands, cased in steel from head to foot, and mounted on excellent horses.

Ros. How your words interest me! I am all ears.

Chev. I sprang to the ground, and drawing my sword, I ordered them to retire. Excuse me the recital of my own praises; you will understand I was forced to kill them all three. After one of the bloodiest combats——

Ros. Did you receive any wounds?

Chev. One of them merely missed, by a hair's-breadth, impaling me with his lance; but having avoided it, I discharged on his head so violent a blow that he fell stark dead. Immediately approaching the girl, I recognized in her a princess, whose name it is impossible for me to reveal.

Ros. I understand your reasons, and will take

care not to press you for them. Discretion is a law for every man who knows the world.

Chev. The favors with which she distinguished me must remain equally secret. I brought her home and she granted me an assignation for the next day; but the king, her father, having promised her in marriage to the Bashaw of Caramania, it was extremely difficult for us to meet in secret. Independently of sixty eunuchs, who watched over her day and night, she had been intrusted since her infancy to a giant named Moloch.

Ros. Waiter, bring me a glass of Tokay.

Chev. You can imagine what the enterprise was! To penetrate into an unapproachable castle built on a wave-lashed rock and surrounded by such a guard! Here, my Lord Rosemberg, was the scheme I conceived. Lend me your attention, I beg.

Ros. Holy Virgin! my brain is all on fire.

Chev. I took a boat and gained the open sea. Then, having precipitated myself into the waves, by means of a certain talisman given me by a Bohemian sorcerer who is one of my friends, I was cast up on the shore in all respects like a drowned man. It was at the hour when the giant Moloch was going his rounds on the ramparts; he found me stretched out upon the sand and carried me into his bed.

Ros. I guess already; it is capital.

Chev. They lavished attendance upon me. As for me, I was only waiting with my eyes half closed, for the moment when I should find myself alone with the giant. Immediately throwing

myself upon him, I seized him by the right leg and hurled him into the sea.

Ros. I shiver; my heart throbs.

Chev. I admit I ran some risk, for at the noise of his fall the sixty eunuchs ran up, sabre in hand; but I had had the time to throw myself back on the bed and appeared to be sound asleep. Far from conceiving any suspicion, they left me in the room with one of the princess's women to watch by me. Then drawing from my breast a phial and a poinard, I commanded this woman to follow me, in the interval while all the eunuchs were at supper. "Take this potion," said I to her, "and mix it cunningly in their wine, or I poniard you on the spot." She obeyed me without venturing to utter a word, and soon, the draught's action having sent the eunuchs to sleep, I was left master of the castle. I went straight to the woman's apartments.

I found them undressed to go to bed; but not wishing to do them any harm, I contented myself with shutting them up in their rooms and taking charge of the keys, which were to the number of six score. Then all difficulties being removed, I went to the princess's room. Scarcely had I reached the threshold, when I bent one knee to the ground. "Queen of my heart," said I to her in a tone of the profoundest respect. But excuse me, Lord Rosemberg, I am forced to stop; modesty makes it imperative.

Ros. No! I see; nothing can resist you. Ah! how I long to be at court. But where am I to find these unknown potions, these mysterious talismans, Sir Chevalier?

Chev. That is difficult; nevertheless I will

tell you a thing in confidence. Look, if you have money it is the best talisman to be found.

Ros. Thank heaven! I don't lack for that. My father is the richest nobleman of the countryside. The eve of my departure he gave me a good round sum, and my aunt Beatrix (she was crying) also slipped into my hand a fine purse that she had worked. My horses are in good condition and well-fed, my lackeys well-dressed, and I am not a bad figure myself.

Chev. Capital; it is all that is needed.

Ros. The worst of it is that I know nothing. No, I can learn nothing by heart. My hand shakes at every turn when I am talking to women.

Chev. Come, empty your glass. To succeed in the world, Lord Rosemberg, remember well these three maxims: See is Know; Will is Can; and Dare is Have.

Ros. I must have that in writing. The words seem to me bold and sonorous. Still, I admit I don't quite understand them.

Chev. If you want, first of all, to please the women, and that is the first thing to be done if you would do anything, observe the profoundest respect toward them. Speak of them all (without exception) as neither more nor less than divinities. You may, it is true, if it so please you, say openly to other men that you do not care a fig for these same women; but only do so in a general manner, and without ever slandering one more than the rest.

When you are seated near a pale blonde (on the end of a sofa), and you see her loll languidly on the cushions, keep at a distance, play with

the end of her scarf, and tell her that you have a profound grief. Beside a brunette, if she is lively and merry, try to look like a man of resolution, whisper to her in her ear, and if the tip of your moustache comes near enough to brush her cheek, that is no great harm. But to every woman, as a universal rule, say that she has a pearl enshrined in her heart, and that all ills are nothing, if she lets you press her finger tips. All your ways while about her should be modelled on the polite lackeys, who are covered with gorgeous liveries; in one word, always distinguish scrupulously these two parts of life: the form and the substance—that is the great thing. Thus you will fulfil the first maxim: Seeing is knowing.

Ros. Go on, I beg of you. I feel a new man, and I bless inwardly the chance that brought me acquainted with you at this inn.

Chev. Once you have proved to the women that, with the greatest politeness and an infinite deal of respect, you laugh at them in your sleeve, attack the men. I don't mean by that, that you should make a set at them. On the contrary, never seem to concern yourself either with their sayings or doings. Always be polite, but with an air of indifference. "Make yourself a rarity, and you will be loved," is a Turkish proverb. By this means you will gain a great advantage. Wherever you go, your silence and your listless way will cause people to stare at you when you pass. See that your dress and your surroundings proclaim an extravagant luxury. Keep folks' eyes always on you. Never let it enter your mind to show any doubt of yourself,

for then immediately everybody doubts too. Should you by chance have propounded the merest nonsense in the world, stick to it in the teeth of the very devil; let yourself be knocked on the head sooner than give in.

Ros. Knocked on the head?

Chev. Yes, without doubt. In short, behave exactly as if the sun and the stars were your private property, and the fairy Morgana had held you at the baptismal font. In this way you will fulfil the second maxim: Will is Can; and you will pass for a person to be feared.

Ros. What a gay life awaits me at court, and what a fine thing it is to be a great lord.

Chev. Once approved by the women and admired by the men, keep a watch on yourself, Lord Rosemberg. If you raise your hand, let your first sword-stroke deal death, as your first glance should inspire love. Life is a terrible pantomime, and gesture has nothing to do with thought or speech. If speech has made you beloved, if thought has made you feared, let the gesture know nothing of it. Be yourself then. Strike like the thunderbolt. Let the world disappear from your eyes; let the spark of life that you received from God isolate itself, and become itself a God: let your will be the eye of the lynx, the nose of the weazel, the warrior's arrow. Forget while you act that there are on earth other creatures than he with whom you have to do.

So having gracefully elbowed through the crowd that surrounds you, when you have reached the goal and earned success, you can enter the lists again with the same ease and promise yourself fresh successes. It is then that you will

reap the fruits of the third maxim: Dare is Have; and that you will be really experienced, formidable, and powerful.

Ros. Ah! good heavens! If I had known that sooner! You make me think of a certain evening when I was sitting with my aunt Beatrix in the rabbit warren. I felt just what you say. It seemed to me that the world was disappearing, and that we were left alone under the sky. So I begged her to go indoors. It was as dark as pitch.

Chev. You seem to me still very young, and you are early in the quest of fortune.

Ros. It is none too early when one's destiny is war. I never saw a Turk in my life; I fancy they must be like wild beasts.

Chev. I am sorry that important business prevents my going to court. I should have been curious to see your first appearance there. Meanwhile, if so it please you, I can make you a valuable present that will singularly assist you.

[Drawing a little book from his pocket.]

Ros. That little book? Why, what is it?

Chev. It is a marvelous work—a collection, concise and yet detailed, of all the stories of love, stratagems, combats, and expedients suitable to form a young man and advance him in ladies' graces.

Ros. And the name of this precious book?

Chev. "Sentiments' Safeguard." It is a priceless treasure, and among the tales comprised therein you will find a good number of which I am the hero. Yet I must admit to you that I am not its owner; it belongs to one of my friends,

and I could not part with it unless you gave me ten sequins.

Ros. Ten sequins is nothing to stick at. [*Giving them.*] Especially after the excellent breakfast to which you so gallantly invited me.

Chev. Nonsense! a fish, merely a fish.

Ros. But it was delicious. Can you believe I shall forget this meeting? It was heaven that brought me on this road. So uncomfortable an inn! damp sheets, and no curtains! I should not have staid an hour, had I not fallen in with you.

Chev. What would you have? One must learn to put up with anything.

Ros. Oh, certainly. My aunt Beatrix would be very uneasy if she knew me to be in a bad inn. But we men pay no attention to these miserable details. Heaven guard you, dear Chevalier. My horses are ready and I leave you.

Chev. Farewell, till we meet again; don't forget me. If you should have dealings with Voivode, he is a near relative of mine, and I will remember you.

Ros. Count me your very humble servant.

[*Excunt.*]

ACT THE SECOND

SCENE I.—*The Queen. Ulric. Several Courtiers.*

[*The Court. A Garden.*]

The Queen. Welcome, Count Ulric. The king, our spouse, is at this moment detained far

from us by a too long and cruel war, which has cost our youth a rich portion of its noble blood. It is a sad pleasure to see them thus ready still to shed yet more of it; but yet a pleasure it is, and a glory too for us. The scions of Bohemia's and of Hungary's foremost houses have filled our hearts with pride and martial spirit by rallying round the throne. Whatever be a warrior's fate, who is it would dare deplore it? Not ourself, who am queen, Ulric, nor I who was a daughter of Aragon. I knew your father well, and your young face speaks to me of the past. Therefore live here like the son of a cherished memory. We will speak of you this evening to the chancellor: have patience, it is I who will answer for you to him. Under these auspices you will be received by the king. Since our clarions woke you in your castle, and since from the depths of your seclusion you came in quest of our dangers, we will not let you repent of having been brave and faithful: in pledge of this here is our royal hand.

*[Ulric kisses her hand, then withdraws apart.
Exit the Queen.]*

1st Courtier. There is a man better received at his first sight of the queen than we who are thirty years in attendance.

2nd Courtier. Let us address him and learn who he is.

1st Courtier. Have you not heard? He is the Count Ulric, a Bohemian nobleman. He is seeking his fortune, as a young husband who wants money to pay the piper for his wife to dance to.

2nd Courtier. Do they say his wife is pretty?

1st Courtier. Charming; the pearl of Hungary..

2nd Courtier. What is that other young man tripping past there so hurriedly?

1st Courtier. I don't know him. He is one more new-comer. The king's liberality draws this way all the flies who are in quest of a ray of sunshine.

[*Enter Rosemberg.*]

2nd Courtier. This one seems to be a gay butterfly, a regular wasp, with his striped doublet. My lord, your servants. What brings you into the gardens?

Ros. [*Aside.*] I am questioned on every side, and I don't know if I should answer. All these strange faces and these staring eyes that put one out of countenance confuse me desperately! [*Aloud.*] Where is the queen, gentlemen? I am Astolphe de Rosemberg, and I wish to be brought to her presence.

1st Courtier. The queen has just left the palace. If you want to see her, wait her passing, and she will return in an hour.

Ros. The devil! that is annoying.

[*He sits down on a bench.*]

2nd Courtier. You are come for the festivities, no doubt?

Ros. Are there festivities? What luck!—No, gentlemen, I am come to take service in the army.

1st Courtier. Everybody is doing that at present.

Ros. Why, yes! so it seems. Many meddle with it, but few come out of it well.

2nd Courtier. You speak with severity.

Ros. How many country squires do we see here not worth so much as naming, yet who for all that take upon themselves as if they were great captains? To see them, you would say they need only cross their horses to drive the Turk beyond the Caucasus; and yet they come out of some hole in Bohemia like hungry rats.

Ulric. [*Approaching.*] My lord, I am Count Ulric, a Bohemian nobleman, and I find a little levity in your words which at your age is pardonable, but which I counsel you to retrench. To be flippant is as great a blemish as to be poor, let me tell you, and let this lesson profit you.

Ros. [*Aside.*] It is my Bohemian of the inn. [*aloud.*] To express oneself in general terms is no offense to any one. As for the matter of the lesson, I have given them sometimes, but never took one yet.

Ulric. These are big words;—and where, pray, do you come from yourself, to be entitled to use them?

1st Courtier. Come, my lords, do not let a few words dropped without intention make a ground of quarrel. We think it our duty to intervene; reflect that you are in the queen's precincts. This word alone is enough.

Ulric. That is true, and I thank you for your timely warning. I should think myself unworthy of the name I bear did I not yield to so just a remonstrance.

Ros. Let it be as you please; I have nothing to say to this.

[*Exeunt Courtiers. Ulric and Rosemberg remain seated on opposite sides.*]

Ros. [Aside]. The Chevalier Uladislas advised me always to stick to a thing once uttered. Since I have been at this court that worthy man's words are never out of my head. I don't know what is going on in me; I feel as if I had a lion's heart. If I am not greatly mistaken I shall make my fortune.

Ulric. [Aside]. How kindly the queen received me, and yet I experience a sadness that nothing can overcome. What is Barberine doing now? Alas! alas! Ambition! Was I not happy in that old castle? Poor, doubtless, but what then? O madness! dreamers that we are!

Ros. [Aside]. It is above all that book I bought which turns my brains upside down. If I open it on going to bed I cannot sleep all night. What surprising tales, what admirable stories! One hews a whole army to pieces; another jumps from the top of a belfry into the Caspian Sea without injuring himself; and to think that it is all true—all has happened! One especially dazzles me. [*Getting up and reading aloud.*] "When the Sultan Bobadil"—Ah! there is some one listening; it is that Bohemian nobleman. I must make my peace with him. When I picked a quarrel with him I forgot he had a pretty wife. [*To Ulric.*] You come from Bohemia, my lord? You must know my uncle, the Baron d'Engelbrecht?

Ulric. Very well; he is one of my neighbors. We hunted together last year. He is connected (distantly, it is true) with my wife's family.

Ros. You are a connection of my uncle d'Engelbrecht! Pray let us be acquainted. Is it long since you left home?

Ulric. I have only been a day here.

Ros. You seem to say that regretfully. Can you have any reason to look back with sadness? No doubt it is always vexatious to leave one's family, above all when one is married. Your wife is young, since you are, and therefore handsome. There is a matter for uneasiness.

Ulric. Uneasiness is not what galls me. My wife is fair; but a July sun is not purer in its cloudless sky than the noble heart in her dear breast.

Ros. That is saying a great deal. Save God, who can know a woman's heart? I avow that in your place I should not be at ease.

Ulric. And why, so please you?

Ros. Because I should suspect my wife unless she were virtue itself.

Ulric. I believe mine to be.

Ros. So you own a phoenix. Is the privilege of our good King Mathias' granting that distinguishes you among all husbands?

Ulric. It is not the king who granted me this favor, but God, who is somewhat more than king.

Ros. I have not a doubt you are right; but you know what the philosophers say, with the Latin poet. What lighter than a feather?—dust. Lighter than dust?—wind. Lighter than wind?—woman. Lighter than woman?—nothing.

Ulric. I am a warrior, not a philosopher, and I do not trouble my head for the poets. All I know is that in point of fact my wife is young, straight, and finely made; that there is neither needlework nor handiwork that she does not understand better than any one else; that you could

not find in the whole kingdom a squire or major-domo who can wait at a lord's table with better grace than she. Add to this that she is as skilful as fearless on horseback or hawking, and at the same time can keep her accounts in as good order as any tradesman. There you have her, my lord; and with all that I would not suspect her should I go ten years without sight of her.

Ros. This is a surprising portrait.

[*Enter Polacco.*]

Pol. I kiss your lordships' hands. Good day, my lords. Youth is the mother of health. Ho! ho! Thank God for the pleasant faces! Our lady shield you!

Ros. What's the matter, friend? Whom is your business with!

Pol. I kiss your lordships' hands, and offer you my services—my little services—for the love of God.

Utric. Why, are you a beggar? I did not look to meet one in these alleys.

Pol. A beggar! God help us! A beggar! I am no beggar. I am an honorable man. My name is Polacco. Polacco is not a beggar. By St. Matthew! beggar is not a word to be applied to Polacco!

Utric. Explain yourself, and do not be annoyed if I ask what you are.

Pol. Ho, ho! No offence; there is none. Our young gentleman will tell you. Who does not know Polacco?

Utric. I, since I am a new-comer, and know no one.

Pol. Good, good; you will come to it like the

rest. One is useful in one's time and place—each in his little sphere. . Folks must not be despised.

Ulric. What esteem or contempt can I feel for you if you will not tell me what you are?

Pol. Hush! Silence! The moon rises: there was a cock that crowed.

Ulric. What mysterious idiocy is this gabble a prelude to? You talk like delirium incarnate.

Pol. A mirror, a little mirror. God is God, and the saints are blessed. Here is a little mirror for sale.

Ulric. A pretty purchase; no bigger than my hand, and stitched into leather. It is a Bohemian wizard's glass; they wear the like of it on their breasts.

Ros. Look in it. What do you see?

Ulric. Nothing, on my word; not so much as the tip of my nose. It is a magic glass; it is covered with a myriad of cabalistic signs.

Pol. Live and learn; learn and live!

Ulric. Oh, ho! I understand what you are. Yes, an honest wizard, by my soul! Well, what does one see in your glass?

Pol. Learn and live; live and learn.

Ulric. Really! Then I think I understand again. If I am not mistaken, this mirror should show the absent. I have seen sometimes some that were given out to be such. Several of my friends carry them in the army.

Ros. By Jupiter, my lord Ulric, here is an offer that comes pat. You were talking of your wife. This mirror is the very thing for you. And tell me, honest Polacco, can one only see

people in it? Can one not see what they are doing at the same time?

Pol. White is white; yellow is gold. Gold is the devil's; white is God's.

Ulric. Withdraw, my good friend; neither his lordship nor I need your services. He is single, and I am not superstitious.

Ros. No, on my life. Lord Ulric, since you are my kinsman, I will do this for you. I will buy this mirror myself, and we will look in this minute to see if your wife chats with her neighbor.

Ulric. Withdraw, old sir, I beg of you.

Ros. No, no! He shall not go without our trying this test. How much for your mirror, Polacco?

[Ulric moves away, and walks up and down.]

Pol. Ho, ho! Every dog has his day, my lord. All comes to hand; each dog his day.

Ros. I ask—your price?

Pol. Refuse and muse; muse and refuse.

Ros. I don't muse; I want to buy your glass.

Pol. Ho, ho! Who loses time, time catches; who loses time——

Ros. I understand you. Stay, here is my purse. You are afraid, no doubt, that you should be seen plying your little calling here in public.

Pol. *[Taking the purse.]* Well said, well said, my dear lord. The walls have eyes, and the trees too. God save the police; the police are gentlemen.

Ros. Now you are to explain to us the magical effects of this little glass.

Pol. My lord, on fixing your eyes attentively

on this mirror, you will see a little mist, which little by little clears away. If the attention be redoubled, a vague and undefined form soon begins to come out. Attention again redoubled, the form becomes clear. It shows you the portrait of the absent person of whom you thought on taking the glass. If that person is a woman, and she be faithful to you, the face is white and almost pale. She smiles on you faintly. If the person is only tempted, the face is tinted with a blond yellow, like the gold of a ripe wheat ear. If she is unfaithful, it becomes coal black, and immediately a foul smell is perceived.

Ros. A foul smell, you say?

Pol. Yes, as when water is thrown on lighted coals.

Ros. It is well. Now take what you want from that purse, and give me back the rest.

Pol. Who comes shall know; who knows shall come.

Ros. Do you sell this toy so dear?

Pol. Who comes shall see; who sees shall come.

Ros. The devil take you and your proverbs.

Pol. I kiss hands, hands—— Who comes shall see—— [*Exit.*]

Ros. Now, Lord Ulric, if you are agreeable, it is easy for us to know whether you or I be in the right.

Ulric. I already answered you: I can not stand these juggleries.

Ros. Bah! You heard as I did that worthy sorcerer's explanation. What does it cost you to put it to the proof? Cast your eye on the mirror, I beg.

Ulric. Look in it yourself, if so it please you.

Ros. Yes, by my word; failing you, it is I that am really to look in it, and think for you of your dear countess, were it only to see her charming phantom—white or yellow. Stay, I see her already!

Ulric. Once for all, sir knight, do not continue in this tone. This is my advice to you.

SCENE II

The same. Several Courtiers.

1st Courtier. [*To Ulric.*] Count Ulric, the queen is returning directly to the palace. She has ordered us to tell you that your presence will be needed there.

Ulric. A thousand thanks, gentlemen; and I am wholly at her majesty's orders.

Ros. [*Still looking in the mirror.*] Tell me, gentlemen, do you not smell some singular odor?

1st Courtier. What kind of odor?

Ros. Ha! Like quenched coal.

Ulric. [*To Rosemberg.*] Have you sworn to wear out my patience, then?

Ros. Look yourself, Count Ulric; assuredly that is no white.

Ulric. Boy, you insult a woman you do not know.

Ros. That is perhaps because I know others.

Ulric. Well, then, since mirrors please you, look at yourself in this one. [*He draws his sword.*]

Ros. Wait; I am not on guard! [*Draws his sword also.*]

SCENE III

The Same. The Queen. All the Court.

The Queen. What does this mean, young gentlemen? I did not think it was to water my parterre that Hungarian swords left the scabbard. What is the ground of this quarrel?

Ulric. Madam, pardon me. There are insults I cannot endure. It is not I that am offended, it is my honor.

The Queen. What is the question? Speak!

Ulric. Madam, I left a wife, as fair as virtue's self, shut up in my castle. This young man, whom I do not know, and who does not know my wife, has none the less aimed at her raillery on which he prides himself. I protest at your feet that this very day I refused to draw my sword from respect to the place where I stand.

The Queen. [*To Ros.*] You seem very young, my child. What motive can have led you to slander a woman who is unknown to you?

Ros. Madam, I did not slander a woman. I expressed my opinion of all women in general, and it is not my fault if I can not change it.

The Queen. By my word, I did not think experience wore so fair a beard.

Ros. Madam, it is just and easily believed that your majesty should defend the virtue of women. I can not have the same reasons as your majesty to do so.

The Queen. That is a rash answer. Each indeed may have on this subject what opinion he will; but what think you, gentlemen? Is

there not a presumptuous and arrogant folly in the pretension to judge all women? It is a wide plea to uphold, and were I the opposing advocate—I, your gray-haired queen—I could cast into the balance some words that you do not know. Why, who has taught a boy like you to despise your nurse? You are fresh from school, it seems; is this what you read in the blue eyes of the girls who drew water at your village fountain? Is it so then? The first word you spelled out on the trembling leaves of a celestial legend was disdain? You, at your age, feel it? I am younger than you then, for you make my heart beat. Stay, lay your hand on Count Ulric's: I know his wife no more than you do, but I am a woman, and I see how his sword quivers still in his hand. I wager you my wedding ring that his wife is as faithful to him as the Virgin to God!

Ulric. Queen, I take up the wager, and stake on it all I possess on earth, if this young man choose to accept it.

Ros. I am three times as rich as you.

The Queen. What is your name?

Ros. Astolphe de Rosemberg.

The Queen. What, you are a Rosemberg? I know your father; he spoke to me of you. Come, come, Count Ulric wagers nothing against you; we will send you back to school.

Ros. No, your majesty. It shall not be said that I held back, if the Count take up the wager.

The Queen. And what is your wager?

Ros. If he will give me his knightly word that he will write to his wife nothing of what has passed between us, I lay my fortune against his—at least up to an equal stake—that I will take

my way to-morrow to the castle he inhabits, and and that this heart of diamond on which he counts so surely will not resist me long.

Ulric. I take you, and it is too late to unsay your words. You have wagered before the queen, and since her august presence obliged me to lower my sword's point, it is she I will take for my second in this honorable duel I propose.

Ros. I accept, and nothing shall make me unsay it; but I must have a letter of introduction to procure me a freer approach.

Ulric. With all my heart—what you please.

The Queen. I hold myself then as your witness, and as judge of the quarrel. The wager shall be recorded by the king's, my master's, chancellor of justice, and to your words I add mine; that no power on earth shall bend me when the day is over. Go, gentlemen; God protect you!

ACT THE THIRD

SCENE I—*Rosemberg. Kalekairi.*

[*A room in Barberine's castle. Several vast windows in an inner court open at the back. Through one of these windows is seen a cell in an old Gothic tower, its window also open.*]

Ros. So, my pretty child, you were saying that your name was Kalekairi?

Kal. It was my father's choice.

Ros. Very good. And your mistress is not to be seen?

Kal. She is dressing. She has been dressing a long time. She said she was to be told.

Ros. Don't be in a hurry, Kalekairi. If I am not mistaken, that is a Turkish or an Arabian name at least.

Kal. Kalekairi came into the world at Trebizond, but she was not born for the mean place she fills.

Ros. Are you discontented with your lot? Have you to complain of your mistress?

Kal. No one complains of her.

Ros. Tell me frankly.

Kal. What do you call frankly?

Ros. Saying what one thinks.

Kal. When Kalekairi thinks of nothing she says nothing.

Ros. Quite right. [*Aside.*] Here's a little savage who doesn't look too forbidding. [*Aloud.*] So you like your mistress then?

Kal. Everybody likes her.

Ros. They say she is very pretty.

Kal. They are right.

Ros. She is a coquette, I fancy, since she is so long over her toilet.

Kal. No, she is kind.

Ros. Then why did you complain of living in this castle?

Kal. Because my mother's daughter ought to have many attendants, instead of being one herself.

Ros. I understand. Some reverse of fortune.

Kal. The pirates carried me off.

Ros. The pirates! Tell me the story.

Kal. It is not a story. It makes one cry. Kalekairi never speaks of it.

Ros. Really?

Kal. No, not even to my parrot, not even to my dog Monmouth, not even to the rose-tree that is in my room.

Ros. You are discreet, I see.

Kal. One must be.

Ros. That is my opinion. Did you serve your apprenticeship here?

Kal. No, I went to Constantinople, to Smyrna, and to the Pasha's house at Janina.

Ros. Oh, ho! Young as you are, you must have had some experience of the world.

Kal. I have always waited upon women.

Ros. There is no better school. So look, now, pretty Kalekairi, if your mistress receives me well, I look forward to spending some time here. If I need your good offices, will you be disposed to oblige me?

Kal. With much pleasure.

Ros. Well answered. Stay; as a Turk, you ought to like the color of sequins. Take this purse and go and announce me.

Kal. Why do you give me this?

Ros. To make acquaintance. Go and announce me, my dear child.

Kal. There was no need for the sequins.

SCENE II

Rosemberg alone. Then Barberine, in the Turret.

Ros. There is an odd waiting-maid. What a singular idea it is for this Count Ulric to have his wife guarded by a sort of a she-Mameluke!

It cannot be denied that whatever happens to me has something so fantastic about it that it seems almost supernatural. . . . Come, anyhow I have made a good beginning. The attendant is enlisted on my side. As for the mistress, let me see? What means shall I employ there? Stratagem, force, or love? Force! Shame upon it! It would neither be the part of a man of honor nor fair on the wager. As for love, that might be tried; but then that is a long business, and I want to conquer like Cæsar. Ah! I see some one in that turret. It is the Countess herself; I recognize her. She is doing her hair. I even think that she is singing.

Barb. [Singing].

Gay cavalier, that ridest to the fray,
Whither away
So far from here?
Seest not how night with darkling fears is rife,
And that our life
Is but a tear.

Ros. She does not sing badly, but it seems to me that her song expresses a regret. Yes, something like a memory. Hum! When I took this bet, I think I acted very hastily. There are moments when one can't answer for oneself. It is like a puff of wind catching in your cloak. Plague on it! There must be no mistake about the matter. I have a round sum on it. Let me see. Shall I use stratagem?

Barb. [2nd stanza].

Say you, you credit that a love forsaken,
From the heart shaken,

Spreads wing to fly?
Ah, well-a-day! ye seekers after fame,
Even your flame
Leaps but to die.

Ros. This song has still the same burden, but what does a song go for? Yes, the more I think of it, the more stratagem seems to me the real way to succeed. Stratagem and love together would work wonders; but the truth is, I don't know much of strategy. If I were to do like that Uladislas, when he tricked the giant Moloch; but here is the fault of all these stories. They are charming to listen to, but one doesn't know how to put them in practice. Yesterday, for instance I was reading the story of a hero of romance, who, in my situation, hid himself for a whole day to get into his mistress's room. Can I hide myself in a chest? I should come out covered with dust, and my clothes would be spoiled. Bah! I think I have done the right thing. Yes, the best of all stratagems is to give money to the waiting-maid. I will dazzle all the other servants in the same way. Ah, here comes Barberine. Well then, all is settled; I will employ strategy and love together.

SCENE III

Rosemberg. Barberine. Kalekairi.

Kal. [*She stays in the background*]. Here is the mistress.

Barb. My lord, you are welcome. You come from the court, I am told. How is my husband?

What is he doing? Where is he? At the wars? Alas, answer me.

Ros. He is at the wars, madam—at least I think so. As for what he is doing, it seems easy to tell; to look at you is to be certain. Who can have seen you and forget you? He is thinking of you, countess, no doubt; and far though he be from you, his fate merits envy rather than pity if you on your part are thinking of him. Here is a letter he entrusted to me.

Barb. [*Reading*]. “He is a young knight of the greatest merit, and belongs to one of the noblest families of the two kingdoms. Receive him as a friend.” I will read you no more; we are rich only in good-will, but we will do our best to temper the poverty of your reception.

Ros. I left my horses and my grooms somewhere over there. In view of my birth and my following, I can not travel without a considerable fortune. But I do not want to inconvenience you with this train.

Barb. Pardon me, my husband would be vexed with me if I did not insist upon it. We will send and tell them to come here.

Ros. What thanks can I offer for so favorable a reception? That white hand deigned to signal from the top of these turrets for the gate to be opened to me, and these bright eyes do not contradict it, noble Countess. They open to me also the gate of an hospitable heart. Give me your leave to go myself and give directions to my suite, and I will return to you; I have a few orders to give. [*Aside.*] Courage, and a full pocket. I want to take the air of the neighborhood a little.

SCENE IV

Barberine. Kalekairi.

Barb. What do you think of this young man, my dear?

Kal. Kalekairi does not like him at all.

Barb. He displeases you! Why so? It seems to me he is not bad looking.

[Sitting down.]

Kal. Certainly!

Barb. What is it that shocks you then? He does not express himself ill—a little courtier-like; but that is the fault of his youth, and he brings good news.

Kal. I don't think so.

Barb. What, you don't believe it! Here is my husband's letter, full of tenderness for me and friendship for his ambassador.

[Kalekairi shakes her head].

Why, what has this Monsieur de Rosemberg done to you?

Kal. He has given gold to Kalekairi.

Barb. *[Laughing].* Is that what has offended you? Well you have only to give it back.

Kal. I am a slave.

Barb. Not here. You are my companion and my friend.

Kal. If the gold were given back he would distrust.

Barb. What do you mean? Explain yourself. You treat him as a conspirator.

Kal. Kalekairi has done nothing for him; she has not opened the door; she has not settled a

room; she has not even prepared a meal. He wanted to deceive Kalekairi.

Barb. But Kalekairi is very quick to take offense. Did he try to make love to you?

Kal. Oh, no!

Barb. Well, then, what is there so surprising? He is a new-comer at the chateau. Is it not natural enough he should seek to gain some goodwill here? Besides, he is rich, as it seems, and rather pleased it should be known; it is a grand seigneur's little way.

Kal. He does not know Count Ulric.

Barb. What, does not know him?

Kal. No. He spoke to L'Uscoque, the porter, and asked him if he liked his master. He asked me, too, if I liked you. He does not know us.

Barb. What a crazy girl! So these are the fine proofs that cause you suspicions about him! And what great crime do you think he is plotting, pray?

Kal. When I was at Janina, a Christian came who loved my mistress. He, too, gave much gold to the slaves, and he was cut into pieces.

Barb. Pity on us, how you go to work! Look at this little lioness! And you imagine, apparently, that this young man has come to make a conquest of me? Is not that at the bottom of your thoughts?

[*Kalekairi signs in the affirmative.*]

Well, then, my dear, be free from anxiety. You may drop your fright and your little methods, which are a trifle too Asiatic. I do not fancy that a stranger will come and speak to me of love at

the first encounter. But suppose it to be so, you may rest assured— Here is our guest; you may leave us alone. 'Let us step aside a little. [*Aside.*] None the less, it would be droll if she were right.

[*They retire to the back of the stage.*]

SCENE V

The same. Rosemberg

Ros. [*Thinking himself alone*]. I think that my plan is settled now. In Uladislas's little book there is the history of a certain Iachimo who lays a wager exactly like mine with Leonatus, son-in-law to the king of Great Britain. This Iachimo secretly introduces himself into the fair Imogen's chamber in her absence, and takes down on his tablet an exact description of the chamber—here, such and such a door, there a window, so, the staircase runs thus. He notes the prettiest details, just as if he were a general making his preparations for a campaign. I will imitate this Iachimo.

Barb. [*Aside*]. He looks as if he were thinking over something.

Kal. [*Also aside*]. Don't doubt it. Perhaps he is a Turkish spy.

Ros. L'Uscoque, the porter, took money. I will slip by stealth into Barberine's room, and there— Yes, what shall I do if I fall in with her there? Hum! it is embarrassing and dangerous.

Kal. Do you see how he ponders?

Ros. Well! I will plead my cause, for heaven keep me from offending her; it would be dishonor to myself. But in all novels, and even in ballads, what do the most perfect lovers do but gain an entrance thus to the lady of their thoughts, when they can. It is always the more convenient, and one is less interrupted—Ah, there is the fair Countess. Suppose I tried first of all some phrases of gallantry, just in a casual way? Let us see what she has to say on this text; that can do no harm, for after all, if I were lucky enough to win her favor, that would dispense with strategy; and it is that stratagem which perplexes me. [*Aloud*]. Pardon me, Countess, for so long an absence from you; my train is considerable, and one must get things in some order.

Barb. Nothing truer; and I beg you will be good enough to consider yourself perfectly free in this house. You understand that a friend of my husband's can not be a stranger for us. [*To Kalekairi*]. Go, Kalekairi; go, my dear, and don't be afraid.

[*Exit Kalekairi.*]

Ros. You fill me with gratitude. To tell you the truth, I only feared in coming to your house that I might be troublesome; and I should run a great risk of becoming so were I to let my heart speak.

Barb. [*Aside*]. His heart speak! What language! [*Aloud*]. Rest assured, Lord Rosemberg, that you do not inconvenience me at all, for the liberty I offer you is very necessary for myself, and I grant it to you to avail myself of the same.

Ros. That is understood. I know the claims of society, and I am aware of the duties your rank brings with it. A chatelaine is queen in her own house, and you, madam, are twice queen by descent and beauty.

Barb. That is not it. The fact is that we are at present busy with the vintage.

Ros. Yes, indeed, as I passed I saw troops of peasants on these hills. It is a sort of festival, and you no doubt receive on this occasion the homage of your vassals. They must be happy, since they belong to you.

Barb. Yes, but they are a great worry. I have to spend all day in the fields to get in the maize and the late hay.

Ros. [*Aside*]. If she answers me in this strain, the talk will not be very poetic.

Barb. [*Aside*]. If he persists in his compliments, it may be amusing.

Ros. Countess, I avow that one thing surprises me. It is not to see a noble lady watch over the care of her domains, but I should have thought she would have watched from a greater distance.

Barb. I understand. You are from the court, and the beauties of Albe Royale do not take their gilt shoes for walks in the grass.

Ros. That is true, madam; and do you not think that this life, all made up of pleasures, festivities, enchantments, and magnificence, is an admirable thing indeed? Without wishing to slander the rustic virtues, is not a pretty woman's right place there in that brilliant sphere? Look in your glass, Countess. Is not a pretty woman creation's masterpiece, and are not all the world's

riches made to surround her, and, were it possible, to embellish her?

Barb. Yes, no doubt that can give pleasure. Your fine ladies only see this poor world from their palfrey's back, or if their foot rest on earth their is a cloth of velvet underneath it.

Ros. Oh, not always! My aunt Beatrix goes into the fields like you too.

Barb. Ah! your aunt is a good housekeeper.

Ros. Yes, and very stingy, except to me, for she would give me the cap off her head.

Barb. Really?

Ros. Oh, certainly; nearly all the jewels I wear come from her.

Barb. [*Aside*]. There is not much harm in this boy. [*Aloud*]. I like good housekeepers greatly, seeing that I myself set up to be one. There, you see the proof of it.

Ros. What is that? God forgive me, a spindle and distaff.

Barb. These are my weapons.

Ros. Is it possible? What! you practice this old trade of our grandmothers? You plunge these beautiful hands into this wisp of tow?

Barb. I try to give them as little rest as may be. Does not your aunt spin?

Ros. But my aunt is old, madam; it is only old women that spin.

Barb. Indeed! are you quite sure of that? I don't believe it should be so. Do you know this old maxim, that work is prayer? That was said long ago. Well, if the two things are alike, and to God's eyes they may be, is it not just that the harder task should be the lot of the young? Is it not when our hands are gay and brisk and full

of activity that they should turn the spindle? And when age and fatigue one day force them to stop, is not then the time for them to be clasped in prayer, leaving the rest to the Supreme Goodness? Believe me, Lord Rosemberg, never speak evil of our distaffs, nor even of our needles; I repeat, these are our weapons. It is true that you men wear more glorious arms, but these have their worth too; here is my lance and my sword.

[*Showing the spindle and distaff.*]

Ros. [*Aside*]. The sermon is not badly turned, but I am still far from my wager. Let us make one attempt to get back to it. [*Aloud*]. What is said so well, madam, can not be gainsaid. But weapon for weapon, you will allow me to prefer ours.

Barb. You love combats then, I see?

Ros. Can you ask it of a nobleman! Save war and love, what business has he in the world?

Barb. You have begun early. Do explain one thing for me. I have never been able to understand how a man covered with iron can manage with ease a horse that is also caparisoned in steel from head to foot. That noise of old iron must be deafening and you must feel as if you were in a prison.

Ros. [*Aside*]. I think she is trying to put me to the rout. [*Aloud*]. A good knight fears nothing if he wears his lady's colors.

Barb. You are brave, it seems. Are you very much in love with your aunt?

Ros. With all my heart, in the way of friendship, of course; for as to love, that is another thing.

Barb. One does not feel love for one's aunt?

Ros. I could not feel it for any one at all, with the exception of one single person.

Barb. You have lost your heart.

Ros. Yes, madam, not long ago, but for all my life.

Barb. For a certainty it is some girl you mean to marry.

Ros. Alas, madam, it is impossible. She is young and beautiful, it is true, and she has all the qualities that can make the happiness of a husband; but this is not in store for me—her hand is another's.

Barb. That is annoying—you must get well of it.

Ros. Alas, madam, I must die of it.

Barb. Bah! at your age?

Ros. What! at my age! Are you so much older than I am then?

Barb. Much. I am reasonable.

Ros. I was too till I saw her. Ah, if you knew who she was! If I dared to pronounce her name before——

Barb. Do I know her?

Ros. Yes, madam. And since my secret has half escaped me, I would entrust it to you completely if you promised not to punish me for it.

Barb. Punish you! On what account? I have nothing to say to it, I presume.

Ros. More than you think, madam; and if I dared——

SCENE VI

The same. Kalekairi.

Ros. [*Aside*]. Plague on the little savage! It has cost me much trouble to get so far——

Kal. L'Uscoque, the porter, came to tell me that there were a great many carts on the road.

Barb. What is it?

Kal. It is for your ear only.

Barb. Come nearer.

Ros. [*Aside*]. What a mystery! Vegetables again! This is a dreadfully middle-class chate-laine.

Kal. [*Whispering to her mistress*]. There are not any carts at all. Rosemberg has given L'Uscoque, the porter, a great deal of gold again.

Barb. [*In a whisper*]. Why? and on what pretext.

Kal. [*Also whispering*]. He asked to be secretly brought into the Mistress' room.

Barb. [*In a whisper*]. My room, do you say? Are you sure?

Kal. [*Also whispering*]. L'Uscoque did not want to say anything, but Kalekairi made him drunk, and he told her all.

Barb. [*Looking at Rosemberg*]. Indeed, this is incredible!

Ros. [*Aside*]. Why, what a curious look she is casting on me!

Barb. [*Still looking*]. Is it possible? This young man, a trifle braggadocio, it is true, but at

bottom of a gentle nature enough, and seemingly — This is very strange.

Kal. [*In a whisper*]. L'Uscoque says now, that if the mistress chooses, he will hide behind the gate with Ludwig, the gardener. They will take a pitchfork apiece, and when he comes—

Barb. [*Laughing*]. No, thank you. You always come back to your expeditious method.

Kal. Rosemberg has many armed servants.

Barb. Yes, and we are lone women, or almost alone, in this house in the depths of a little desert. But I will tell you a very simple thing. There is a guardian, my dear, which defends a woman's honor better than all a seraglio's ramparts or a sultan's mutes, and that guardian is herself. Go, and yet don't be far off. Listen! When I sign to you through this window—

[*She whispers in her ear.*]

Kal. It shall be done.

[*Exit.*]

SCENE VII

Barberine. Rosemberg.

Barb. Well, my lord, what are you thinking of?

Ros. I was waiting to learn if I was to withdraw.

Barb. Were you not just going to make me a confidence? That little girl came in at the wrong moment.

Ros. Oh, yes.

Barb. Well then, go on.

Ros. I no longer have the courage, madam. I don't know how I dared——

Barb. And you dare no longer. You were telling me, I think, that you felt love for a woman who is married to one of your friends.

Ros. One of my friends. I did not say that.

Barb. I thought I heard you. But are you sure I understood you wrongly?

Ros. [*Aside*]. What does she mean? Those terrible eyes of hers seem to me singularly soft at present.

Barb. Well, you don't reply?

Ros. Ah, madam? If you have penetrated my thoughts——

Barb. Is that a reason not to utter them!

Ros. No, I see—you have guessed my secret. Those bright eyes have read in my heart, which betrayed me in spite of myself. I can no longer hide from you a feeling stronger than my reason, overpowering even my respect for you. Learn then, Countess, at once my pain and my folly. Since the first day I saw you I have wandered around this castle among these desert mountains! The army, the court, are no longer anything for me! I left all the moment I could find a pretext to bring me into your presence, were it only for an instant. I love you, adore you! That is my secret, madam. Was I wrong to entreat you not to punish me for it?

[*He falls on one knee.*]

Barb. [*Rising*]. For his age he does not lie badly. [*Aloud*]. You felt, you say, the fear of being punished; had you no fear of offending me?

Ros. [*Rising*]. In what respect can love be an offense? Against whom is it an offense to love?

Barb. Against God, who forbids it.

Ros. No, Barberine! Since God made beauty, how can he have forbidden us to love it? It is his most perfect image.

Barb. But if beauty is God's image, is not the holy faith sworn at his altar a possession far more precious? Did he content himself with creating; and has he not extended, father-like, his hand over his celestial work to defend and protect?

Ros. No. When I am thus at your side, when my hand trembles at the touch of yours, when your eyes rest on me with that bewildering glance—no, Barberine, it is impossible; no, God does not forbid love. Alas! no reproaches. I—

Barb. That you should think me pretty, and tell me so, does not displease me greatly. But what use in saying more? Count Ulric is your friend.

Ros. What do I know? What can I answer? What can I remember at your side?

Barb. What! if I consented to listen to you, neither friendship, nor the fear of God, nor the trust of an honorable man who sends you to me, nor any consideration, can make you hesitate?

Ros. No, on my soul; nothing in the world. You are so beautiful, Barberine! Your eyes are so soft, your smile is happiness itself.

Barb. I told you all that does not displease me. But why take my hand like this? O, heavens! it seems to me that, were I man, I would

die rather than speak of love to a friend's wife.

Ros. And I, for my part, would rather die than cease to speak of love to you.

Barb. Truly! On your honor, is that your mind?

[*She makes a sign out of a window.*]

Ros. On my soul, on my honor.

Barb. You would betray a friend with a light heart. [*A bell is heard ring*]. There is the bell that tells me to go downstairs.

Ros. O, heavens! you leave me thus?

Barb. What am I to say to you? Here is Kalekairi.

SCENE VIII

The same. Kalekairi.

Ros. This Croat, this Transylvanian again.

Kal. The farmers say they are waiting.

Barb. I am coming.

Ros. [*Whispering Barberine*]. What? without a word? without a look to tell me my fate?

Barb. I think you are a great enchanter, for it is impossible to cherish spite against you. My farmers are going to sit down to table: wait for me a moment. I made my escape from them, and I return. Come, Kalekairi, come.

Kal. Kalekairi does not want dinner.

Ros. [*Aside*]. She wants to stay, the little Ethiopian! [*Aloud*]. What, mademoiselle, you are not hungry?

Kal. No, I don't want to. They have stuck a bell up at the top of a great tower; when that

machine rings Kalekairi must eat. But Kalekairi does not want to eat: Kalekairi has no appetite.

Barb. [*Beseechingly*]. Come, child, you shall do as you wish, but I want you. [*Aside.*] I believe, really, that she would be capable of keeping an eye on me myself.

SCENE IX

Rosemberg solus.

Ros. She will return. She tells me to await her, while she goes to send her household out of the way. Can she convey to me more clearly that I have found favor with her? What do I say? Is it not an avowal that she loves me? Is not this the most delightful assignation? Par-bleu! I was a great simpleton to rack my brains and spend my money to imitate that ass of an Iachimo. It is much need, indeed, to go and hide oneself when one has only to appear and conquer. It is true I had no reasonable expectation of so quickly winning a hearing. O, Fortune, what munificence! No, I never expected it. That proud countess—that rich stake—all won in so short a time. How well that dear Uladislas knew! So I am to hear her speak to me of love, for I know it will be her turn now—she, Barberine, oh, beauty! oh, ineffable joy! I can not rest, yet I need a little patience. [*Sits down*]. Really, this frailty of woman is a great misfortune. Won so soon! Do I love her? No, I don't love her. For shame! To betray like this a husband so upright and so truthful,

to yield to a stranger's first amorous glance. What can you do with such a creature? Stay here, indeed! I have other fish to fry. Who will resist me now? Already I see myself arriving at the Court, and crossing the long galleries with a careless step. The courtiers make way in silence, the women whisper. The rich stake lies on the table and the Queen has a smile on her lips. Rosemberg, what a haul! Yet, what a thing is luck! When I think of what is happening to me, it seems a dream.—No, there is nothing like boldness.—I think I hear a noise.—Some one is coming up the stairs. Nearer and nearer, coming stealthily up. Ah, how my heart beats!

[The windows close, and the noise of several bolts is heard outside.]

What does this mean? I am locked in. The door is being bolted outside. No doubt it is some precaution of Barberine's. She is afraid that some servant might come in here during dinner. She will have sent her waiting-maid to shut the door upon me, until she can make her escape. If she did not come! If some unforeseen obstacle appeared! Well, she would let me know—— But who is walking like that in the corridor? Some one is coming here. It is Barberine, I recognize her step. Silence. We mustn't look like the schoolboy here. I want to command my face. He to whom such things happen ought not to show surprise at them——

[A wicket opens in the wall.]

Barb. *[Outside, speaking through the wicket].* My Lord Rosemberg, as you are only come here

to commit a theft, the most odious theft, and the most deserving of chastisement, the theft of a woman's honor, and as it is just that the punishment should be proportioned to the crime, you are imprisoned here as a thief. No harm shall be done to you, and your retainers shall continue to be well treated. If you wish to eat and drink, there is nothing for it but to do as those old women whom you do not like; that is to say, to spin. You have, as you know, a spindle and distaff there, for you may rest assured that your rations will be scrupulously increased or diminished according to the quantity of thread that you spin.

[She shuts the wicket.]

Ros. Am I dreaming? Ho, Barberine! Ho, Jean! Ho, Albert! What does this mean? The door is as firm as a wall. It is fastened with iron bars: the windows are barred, and the wicket is no bigger than my cap. Ho, there, somebody; open! open! open! open! It is I, Rosemberg. I am shut up here. Open, who will open to me? Is there anyone here? I beg that you will open to me, if you please. Ho, you there, warder; open to me, sir, I beg you! I will make signs from the window. Hi, friend, come and open for me! He does not hear me. Open! open! I am shut up. This room is on the first story. But what is this? will no one open to me?

Barb. *[Opening the wicket]*. My lord, these cries are of no use. It is beginning to get late. If you wish to sup, it is time to set about spinning.

[*She shuts the wicket.*]

Ros. Ah, well! it is a joke. Little rogue! She wants to rouse my spirits by this malicious freak. I shall be let out in a quarter of an hour. I am a great fool to trouble my head about it. Yes, not a doubt of it; it is just a trick; but it seems to me rather too bad. And all this might make me cut an absurd figure. Hum! to shut me up in a turret. Is a man of my rank to be treated with so little respect? Fool that I am! This proves that she loves me. She would not treat one with such freedom if she had not the sweetest recompense in store; that is clear. Perhaps it is to try my mettle; and my looks are watched. To disconcert them a little I must begin singing quite gaily.

[*Singing.*]

When the moorcock see
Sportsmen on the hill,
Hurrah by valley!
Hurrah by rill!
Hurrah for the gun
That is safe to kill—
Hurrah! fill up, lads,
Hurrah, lads, fill!

Kal. [*Opening the wicket*]. The mistress says that since you are not spinning, you will doubtless do without supper, and she thinks you are not hungry. So I wish you a good-night.

[*Shuts the wicket.*]

Ros. Kalekairi! Listen to me, do! Do listen! Come and keep me company a little while. Can I be caught in a trap? This looks serious.

To pass the night here supperless; and it just happens that I am horribly hungry. How long shall I be left here? Certainly this is serious. Death and furies! Blood and thunder! Accursed Barberine! Infamous, wretched assassin! Curse upon you! unlucky dog that I am! they will wall up the door. I shall be left to die of hunger. It is Count Ulric's vengeance! Alas, alas! have pity on me! Count Ulric wishes my death, that is certain; and his wife executes his orders. Mercy, mercy, I am dead—I am lost! Never again shall I see my father, my poor aunt Beatrix. Alas! ah, heavens! alas; it is all over with me! Barberine! Madame, the Countess! Dear mademoiselle Kalekairi! O, rage; fire and flames! Oh, if I ever get out, they shall all perish by my hand. I will accuse them before the queen herself for assassins and poisoners. Ah, God! ah, heaven, have pity on me!

Barb. [*Opening the wicket*]. My lord, before going to bed I come to learn if you have been spinning.

Ros. I am no spinster! No, I have not spun. I do not spin; I am no spinster. Ah, Barberine, you shall pay for this.

Barb. My lord, when you have spun; you may tell the soldier who is mounting guard at your door.

Ros. Do not go away, Countess. In heaven's name, listen to me!

Barb. Spin, spin.

Ros. No, 'sdeath, zounds, I won't. I will break this distaff. No, I would sooner die.

Barb. Good-bye, my lord.

Ros. One word more; do not go.

Barb. What do you want!

Ros. But—Countess—in truth—I—don't know how to spin. How would you have me spin?

Barb. Learn.

[*She shuts the wicket.*]

Ros. No! never will I spin: not if the sky were to fall and crush me. What a refinement of cruelty; there was this Barberine in dishabille. She is going to get into bed; almost undressed, with her net on, and a hundred times prettier than ever. Ah, night is coming. In an hour hence it will no longer be light. [*He sits down*]. So it is decided; there is no doubt left that not only am I in prison, but I am to be degraded by the lowest of tasks. If I do not spin, my death is certain. Hunger spurs me cruelly. It is six hours since I ate. Not a crumb since breakfast. Wretched Uladislas! may you die of hunger for your advice. What the devil did I come here for? What put such a thing into my head? Much had I to do with this Count Ulric and his prude of a countess. A pretty journey this! I had money, horses and all was for the best. I might have amused myself at court. A plague on the undertaking. I shall have lost my patrimony, and shall have learned to spin. The light is waning more and more, and my hunger increases in proportion. Shall I be reduced to spin? No, a thousand times, no! I would sooner die of hunger as a nobleman. The devil! Truly if I do not spin it will soon be too late! [*He rises*]. How is this distaff made? What infernal machine is this? I understand nothing

about it. How does one set about it? I shall break everything. How complicated it is! Oh, heavens! I remember now she is looking at me. Most assuredly I will not spin.

A voice outside. Who goes there?

[The curfew sounds.]

Ros. The curfew sounds. Barberine will be going to bed. The lights are beginning to show. The mules pass along the road, and the cattle are coming back from the fields. Oh, heavens! to spend the night thus! here in this prison, without fire, light, or supper; cold and hunger! Ho, there, friend! Is there not a soldier on guard?

Barb. *[Opening the wicket].* Well?

Ros. I am spinning, Countess, I am spinning. Send me some supper.

SCENE X

Rosemberg. Kalekairi.

Kal. *[Coming in with two dishes].* Here is supper. There are cucumbers and a lettuce salad.

Ros. Much obliged, indeed! You played the spy and now you are turnkey, wretched little Arab that you are! Why did you take my sequins?

Kal. *[Laying the purse on the table].* Now I can give you them back.

Ros. Bah! money is of no use to me in prison.

[Trumpets heard to sound.]

Who is that arriving? What noise is that? I hear a clatter of horses in the court.

Kal. It is the Queen coming here.

Ros. The Queen, do you say?

Kal. And Count Ulric as well.

Ros. Count Ulric! The Queen! Ah, I am undone! Kalekairi, get me out of this!

Kal. No, you must stay here.

Ros. I will give you as many sequins as you like; but for pity's sake let me out. Tell your guard to let me pass.

Kal. No. Why did you come?

Ros. Ah! you may well ask. Where is the Countess? I want to ask her pardon, or rather to accuse her. Yes, accuse her before the Queen herself; for people can not be shut up in this way. Where is your mistress?

Kal. On the doorstep, ready to receive the Queen.

Ros. And what the deuce is the Queen come here for?

Kal. Kalekairi had written.

Ros. To the Queen?

Kal. No; to Count Ulric.

Ros. And what about?

Kal. For them to come here.

Ros. And find me in this cavern?

Kal. No. When Kalekairi wrote she did not know you would be made spin.

Ros. Ah! So it was the Countess herself who was inspired with this charming idea.

Kal. Yes; and the Countess did not know that Kalekairi had written, for the Countess had written too.

Ros. She wrote too! Very kind of her.

Kal. Yes; while you were shouting so loud. She used to go and look, and then come back. But Kalekairi had written long before. Kalekairi had written as soon as you spoke to her.

Ros. So there was first you and then the Countess! Two denunciations in place of one! Nothing could be better. I was in good hands. Bewitched by two she-devils!

The Sentinel. [*On the doorstep*]. My lord, you are free. The Queen is coming.

Ros. That is very lucky. Good-bye, Kalekairi! Tell your mistress from me that I will not forgive her while I live. And as for you—may all your salads——

Kal. It is very wrong of you, for my mistress said she thought you very nice. Yes, and that you could not fail to win the hearts of many ladies at court, but that this house was not the right place.

Ros. Really! She said so? Well! Kalkairi, I think I forgive her. And as for you—if you choose to be discreet——

Kal. Oh, no!

Ros. What! You were boasting this morning——

Kal. It was to know more this evening. Here is the Queen, with all of them.

Ros. Ah! I am caught.

SCENE XI

The same. The Queen. Ulric. Barberine. Courtiers, etc.

The Queen. [*To Barberine*]. Yes, Countess,

we have been pleased to come ourself and visit you.

Barb. Madame, our poor house is not worthy to receive you.

The Queen. I count it an honor to be received here. [*To Rosemberg*]. Well, 'Rosemberg, and your wager?

Ros. Is lost, madame, as you see.

Kal. Yes; lost with a vengeance.

The Queen. Are you pleased with your journey? What do you think of this castle? I hope you will not forget the hospitality it affords.

Ros. I shall not fail to remember it, madame, whenever I am guilty of a folly.

Kal. [*Aside to Ros.*]. That will be often.

The Queen. It is a pity that this one should cost you somewhat dear.

Barb. Madame, if your majesty will deign to grant me a favor, I will ask your consent to let this wager be forgotten.

Ulric. Madame, I also ask it. If I had doubted of my wife's honor, I might profit by this wager, and be paid for my anxiety; but in all fairness I have gained nothing. Here is the only reward I care for.

[*Takes his wife's hand.*]

Ros. By my patron saint, here is a true man

Kal. [*Aside to Ros.*]. You are cured, are you not?

The Queen. If it so pleases you I am content; but our royal word is pledged, and we can not forget that we stood witness to your quarrel. Therefore, Rosemberg, you shall pay!

Ros. Madame, the money is all ready.

Kal. What will your aunt Beatrix say?

The Queen. But you understand, Count Ulric, that if our justice ordains that the value of the wager should be handed to you, our power does not go so far as to constrain you to accept it. Therefore, Rosemberg, in this matter you shall make your suit to the Countess.

Ros. With all my heart, madame; and were it possible——

The Queen. One moment. We have learned the success of this adventure from the lips of the Countess herself. But these gentlemen do not know it, and it is right that they should be informed, as they assisted like ourselves at the outset of the enterprise. Here are two letters which tell of it. Rosemberg, you shall read them to us.

Barb. Ah, madame——

The Queen. Are you so generous? Well, I will read them myself. First, here is one addressed to the Count, which is not long, for it only contains one word—"Come."—signed, "Kalekairi." Who wrote this?

Kal. It was I, madame——

The Queen. You said little, and said well: that is a rare art. Now, gentlemen, here is the other:—"My very dear and honored husband.—We have just had a visit at the chateau from the young Baron de Rosemberg, who said he was your friend, and sent by you. Though a woman generally—and rightly—keeps a secret of this nature, yet I will tell you that he has spoken to me of love. I hope that, at my instance and request, you will take no vengeance for this, and

will conceive no hatred against him. He is a young man of good family, and has no harm at all in him. He only needed to know how to spin, and that I am going to teach him.—If you chance to see his father at court, tell him not to be uneasy. He is in our great hall on the first floor, where he has a spindle and distaff, and is spinning, or will spin. You will think it extraordinary that I have chosen this occupation for him; but as I perceived that while possessing good qualities he only lacked reflection, I thought it best to teach him this trade, which will permit him to reflect at his ease, while at the same time it may enable him to earn his living. You know that your great hall is closed with very solid bars. I told him to wait for me there, and I shut him in. There is a very convenient wicket in the wall by which his food shall be passed to him, so that I do not doubt that he will leave here with much profit to himself; and if in the course of his life there should befall him some misfortune, he will congratulate himself on having in his hands a sure means of livelihood for the rest of his days. I send you greeting, love, and an embrace.—BARBERINE.”

If you laugh at this letter, my lords, God keep your wives out of harm's way. Nothing is so grave a matter as honor. Count Ulric, until tomorrow we will remain your guests; and we purpose it should be known that we have made this journey followed by our whole court, to let all see that the home which shelters an honorable woman is ground as holy as the Church, and that kings leave their palaces for houses which are God's.

FANTASIO

COMEDY IN TWO ACTS

(PUBLISHED IN 1833; ACTED IN 1866)

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

THE KING OF BAVARIA.

THE PRINCE OF MANTUA.

MARINONI—*His Aid-de-camp.*

RUTTEN—*Secretary to the King.*

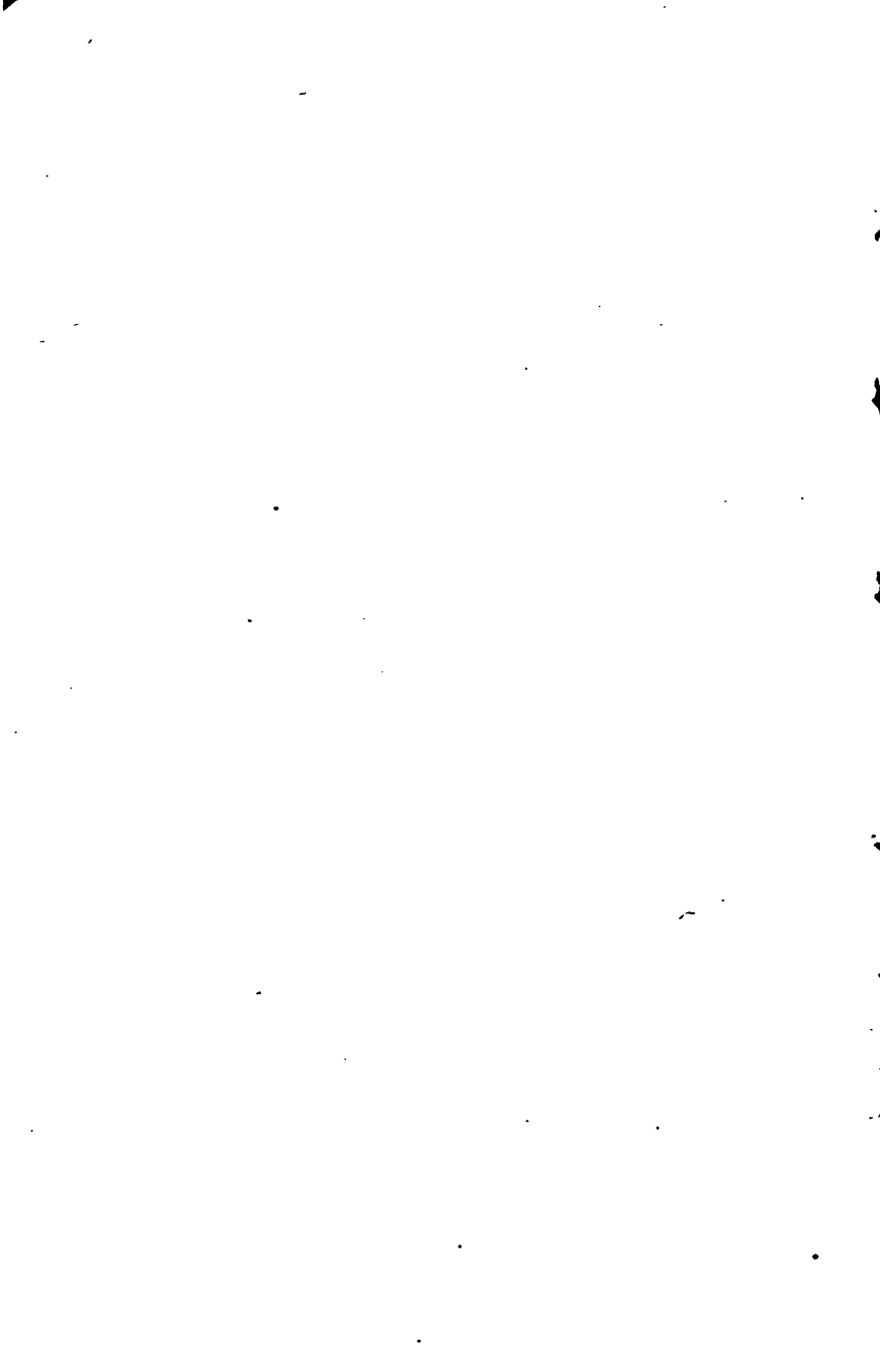
FANTASIO,	} <i>Young Men of the Town.</i>
SPARK.	
HARTMAN,	
FACIO,	

Officers, Pages, etc.

ELSBETH—*Daughter of the King of Denmark.*

The Governess of Elsbeth.

The Scene is at Munich.



FANTASIO

A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS

ACT THE FIRST

SCENE I—*The Court.*

The King surrounded by his Courtiers. Rutten.

The King. My friends, it is already long since I announced to you the betrothal of my dear Elsbeth to the Prince of Mantua. To-day I announce to you the arrival of the Prince. This evening perhaps, to-morrow at latest, he will be in this palace. Let this be a day of rejoicing for everybody. Let the prisons be thrown open, and let the people pass the night in amusements. Rutten, where is my daughter?

[*The Courtiers retire.*]

Rut. Sire, she is in the park with her governess.

King. Why is it that I have not seen her yet

to-day? Is she sad or merry over this marriage that we are preparing?

Rut. It seemed to me that the Princess's countenance was clouded with some melancholy. What girl is there who does not dream the day before her nuptials? She was distressed about the death of St. Jean.

King. Can you believe it? The death of my jester, a court buffoon, hunchbacked and almost blind——

Rut. The Princess liked him.

King. Tell me, Rutten; you have seen the Prince. What kind of man is he? Alas, I am giving him the most precious thing I have in the world, and I know nothing of him.

Rut. My stay at Mantua was very short.

King. Speak frankly. Through what eyes, if not through yours, can I see truth?

Rut. Truly, your majesty, I can say nothing about the noble Prince's mind and character.

King. Stands it so? A courtier like you hesitates. What clouds of praises would already have filled the air of this room, how many hyperboles and flattering metaphors, if the prince, who to-morrow will be my son-in-law, had seemed to you worthy of the title! Can I be mistaken, my friend? Can I have chosen ill?

Rut. Sire, the Prince passes for being the very best of kings. Policy is a subtle spider's web, in which struggles many a poor mangled fly——

King. I will sacrifice my daughter's happiness to no interest!

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II

A Street. Spark, Hartman, and Facio drinking around a table.

Hart. Since this is the Princess's wedding-day, let us drink, let us smoke, and let us try to make a noise.

Facio. It would not be a bad thing to mix with all this crowd of people who are tramping the streets, and then snuff a few torches on honest burghers' heads.

Spark. Come, come, let us smoke quietly.

Hart. I will do nothing quietly. If I had to turn bell-clapper and hang myself up in the big church bell, I must be chiming on a feast day. Now where the devil is Fantasio?

Spark. Let's wait for him; don't let us do anything without him.

Facio. Bah, he will find us out in any case. He is busy fuddling himself in some hole of the Rue Basse. Holloa, ho, one last cup!

[Raising his glass.]

An Officer. *[Entering].* Gentlemen, I come to beg you to be good enough to move further away, if you do not wish to be disturbed in your gaiety here.

Hart. Why, captain?

Officer. The Princess is this moment on the terrace you see yonder, and you will easily understand that it is not fitting that your shouts should reach her. *[Exit].*

Facio. This is intolerable.

Spark. Why can't we laugh elsewhere as well as here?

Hart. Who is there to say we shall be allowed to laugh elsewhere? You will see that a green-coated rascal will spring up out of every street in the town to beg us to go and laugh in the moon.

[*Enter Marinoni, covered with a cloak.*]

Spark. The Princess has never done an act of despotism in her life, God save her. If she does not want laughing, that is because she is sad, or because she is singing; let us leave her in quiet.

Facio. Humph! yonder is a hood that has got wind of some news. This quidnunc wants to accost us.

Mar. [*Approaching*]. I am a foreigner, gentlemen; what is the occasion of this festivity?

Spark. Princess Elsbeth is being married.

Mar. Ah, ah! she is a fine woman, as I suppose?

Hart. You have said it—just as you are a fine man.

Mar. Loved by her people, if I may venture the remark, for it seems to me that the whole place is illuminated.

Hart. You are not mistaken, honest stranger; all these lighted torches you see are, as you wisely remarked, nothing else than an illumination.

Mar. I meant by that to inquire if the Princess is the cause of these signs of joy?

Hart. The sole cause, mighty rhetorician. We might all marry in a body and there would be no sort of joy in this thankless town.

Mar. Happy the princess who knows how to make herself beloved by her people.

Hart. Lighted torches do not make the happiness of a people, my primitive friend; that does not hinder the aforesaid princess from being as fanciful as a mock shepherdess.

Mar. Indeed; fanciful, you said.

Hart. I said so, dear incognitio—I employed that word.

[*Marinoni bows and withdraws.*]

Facio. Who the deuce is this fellow after with his Italian jargon? There he is leaving us to get into talk with another group. He savors plaguey strong of the spy.

Hart. He savors of nothing at all; he is as stupid as you please.

Spark. Here comes Fantasio.

Hart. Why, what's the matter with him? He struts and jests like a justice of the peace. Either I am greatly mistaken or some mad prank is ripening in his brain.

Facio. Well, friend, what shall we make of this lovely evening?

Fant. [*Entering*]. Anything, absolutely anything except a new novel.

Facio. I was saying that we must plunge into this rabble and have a little sport.

Fant. The great thing would be to get cardboard noses and squibs.

Hart. Take girls by the waist, pull the tails of the burghers' wigs, and break the lanterns. Come, let's be off, the word is said.

Fant. Once on a time there was a king of Persia—

Hart. Come on, Fantasio.

Fant. I'm not for you, I'm not for you.

Hart. Why?

Fant. Give me a glass of that.

[*Drinking.*]

Hart. You have the month of May on your cheeks.

Fant. That's true; and January in my heart. My head is like an old grate without fire; nothing but wind and ashes in it. Ouf! [*Sitting down*]. What a plague it is that everybody should be amusing themselves! I would like this great heavy sky to be a huge cotton night-cap, to cover up this silly town and its silly inhabitants to the very ears. Come, for pity's sake let me hear some worn-out pun—something really hackneyed.

Hart. Why?

Fant. To make me laugh. I can laugh no more at folks' inventions: perhaps I shall laugh at what I know.

Hart. You seem to be a thought misanthropic and given to melancholy.

Fant. Not at all; it is only that I am coming from my mistress.

Facio. Yes or no—are you for our party?

Fant. I am for your party if you are for mine; let us stay here a little, talking of one thing or another, looking at our new clothes.

Facio. No, by my word. If you are tired of standing, I am tired of sitting; I must exert myself in the open air.

Fant. I don't feel like exertion. I am going to smoke under these chestnuts with honest Spark here, who will keep me company—won't you, Spark?

Spark. As you please.

Hart. In that case, good-bye. We are going to see the sport.

[*Exeunt Hartman and Facio. Fantasio sits down with Spark.*]

Fant. How miserably that sunset is done! Nature is wretched this evening. Just look at that valley down there and those four or five sorry clouds climbing up the mountain. I used to do landscapes like that when I was twelve years old, on the back of my school copy-books. *quid*

Spark. What good tobacco! What good beer!

Fant. I must certainly be boring you, *Spark.*

Spark. No. Why so?

Fant. You bore me horribly. Does it not worry you to see yourself with the same face? What the devil are Hartman and Facio going to do at those sports?

Spark. They are two active lads that can't stay quiet.

Fant. //Are not the "Arabian Nights" an admirable thing? *Oh*, *Spark*, my dear *Spark*, if you would transport me to China! If I could only get out of my skin for an hour or two! If I could be that gentleman passing! *Conrad*

Spark. That seems to be fairly difficult. *hard*

Fant. That gentleman passing is delightful. Look; what fine silk breeches; what fine red flowers on his vest! The trinkets of his watch-chain dance on his belly, balancing the coat skirts that flutter about his calves. I am sure that man has a thousand ideas in his head that are perfectly strange to me: his essence is peculiar to him. Alas! what men say to each other

is all alike; the ideas they exchange are nearly always the same in every conversation; but in the interior of those isolated machines what folds there are, what secret compartments! What each man carries in him is an entire universe—an unknown world that is born and dies in silence. What solitudes are all these human bodies!

Spark. Can't you drink, you idle dog, instead of racking your brains?

Fant. Just one thing has amused me in the last three days; that is, that my creditors have got a warrant out against me, and that if I set foot in my house, four tipstaves will appear to take me by the nape of the neck.

Spark. Really, that is very cheerful. Where will you sleep this evening?

Fant. With the first girl I meet. Fancy that furniture is being sold to-morrow morning. We'll buy in some of it, won't we?

Spark. Are you short of money, Henry? Will you have my purse?

Fant. Imbecile! If I had no money, I should not have debts. I have a fancy to take a chorus girl for a mistress.

Spark. That will bore you to extinction.

Fant. Not at all, my imagination will be full of pirouettes and white satin shoes; there will be a glove of mine on the balcony rail from the first of January to St. Sylvester, and I will hum clarionet solos in my dreams, till I die at last of indigestion of strawberries, in the arms of my well-beloved. Do you notice one thing, Spark—you and I have no position; we exercise no profession?

Spark. Is that what is depressing you?

Fant. There is no such thing as a melancholy fencing master.

Spark. To my apprehension, you seem to have tried everything and found all wanting.

Fant. Ah! to have tried everything, my friend, one must have traveled far.

Spark. Well, then?

Fant. Well, then? Where would you have me to go? Look at this dingy old town; there is not a square, a street, an alley, I have not prowled over thirty times; there is not a pavement I have not dragged my worn-out heels across, not a house where I don't know who is the girl or the old woman whose stupid head is eternally in relief at the window; I can't take a step without walking on yesterday's trail. Well, my dear friend, this town is nothing to my brain. All its nooks are a hundred times more familiar; all the streets and all the holes of my imagination a hundred times more worn out; I have strolled through that dilapidated brain, its sole inhabitant, in a hundred times more directions; I have fuddled myself in all its public; I have rolled through it like an absolute monarch in a gilded chariot; I have ambled through it like an honest burgher on a quiet mule, and now I don't so much as dare enter there burglar-wise, with a dark lantern in my hand.

Spark. I can not understand this perpetual working at yourself: now, when I smoke, for instance, my thought turns into tobacco smoke; when I drink, it turns into Spanish wine or Flemish beer; when I kiss my mistress's hand, it enters by the tips of her taper fingers to spread itself

in electric currents through her whole being; the scent of a flower will set my mind at work, and the meanest object in the whole volume of universal nature is enough to change me to a bee winging my way hither and thither with a pleasure that is always fresh.

Fant. To put it briefly, you are fit to be a fisherman.

Spark. I am fit for anything if it amuses me.

Fant. Even to catch the moon in your teeth?

Spark. That would not amuse me.

Fant. Ah, ah! How do you know? To catch the moon in your teeth is not a thing to be despised. Let's go and play *trente et quarante*.

Spark. No, indeed.

Fant. Why?

Spark. Because we should lose our money.

Fant. Ah! good heavens! what is this idea? You are at a loss to find something to harass your soul. Wretch! So you can only see the seamy side. Lose our money? Why, have you no faith in God, no hope left in your heart? Are you a frightful atheist, fit to wither my heart and rob me of all my beliefs—me, full of sap and youth as I am?

[*He begins dancing.*]

Spark. Upon my word, there are certain moments when I would not swear you were not mad.

Fant. [*Still dancing*]. Give me a bell, a bell of glass!

Spark. A bell—for what?

Fant. Has not Jean Paul said that a man absorbed in a great thought is like a diver under his bell in the midst of a vast ocean? I have no

bell, Spark, no bell; and I dance like Jesus Christ on the vast ocean.

Spark. Turn journalist or literary man, Henry; it is the most efficacious means left us to counteract misanthropy and deaden imagination.

Fant. Oh! I wish I could lose my heart to a lobster in mustard sauce, to a grisette, or a class to minerals. Spark, let us try to build a house together.

Spark. Why don't you write down all your dreams? They would make a nice collection.

Fant. A sonnet is better than a long poem, and a glass of wine is better than a sonnet.

[*Drinks.*]

Spark. Why don't you travel? Go to Italy.

Fant. I have been there.

Spark. Well, don't you think that a fine country?

Fant. There are a quantity of flies there as big as cockchafers that sting you all night.

Spark. Go to France.

Fant. There's no good Rhine wine in Paris.

Spark. Go to England.

Fant. I am there. Have the English a country of their own? I had as soon see them here as at home.

Spark. Go to the devil, then.

Fant. Oh! if only there were a devil in heaven; if there were a hell, how gladly I would blow out my brains to go and see it all. What a wretched thing man is! Not to be able so much as to jump through a window without breaking his legs!—to be obliged to play the violin ten years to become a decent musician!—

to learn in order to be a doctor or a groom!—to learn before he can make an omelette! Look, Spark, fancies come on me to sit down on a parapet and watch the river flowing, and fall to counting one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, and so on to the day of my death.

Spark. This talk of yours would make many a man laugh; it makes me shudder; it is the history of the whole century. Eternity is a great eyry, whence all the ages, like young eaglets, have in their turn taken wing to cross heaven and vanish. Ours has, in its turn, reached the nest's edge; but its pinions have been clipped, and it waits for death, looking out upon the space into which it can not wing its way.

Fant. [*Singing*].

"Life of my life, say you: nay, soul, say, of my soul,
For soul it hath no ending, and life is but a day."

Do you know a diviner song than that, Spark? It is Portuguese. That song never came into my head without making me want to love some one.

Spark. Whom, for instance?

Fant. Whom? I have not an idea—some lovely girl, like the women Mieris draws, all swelling curves, something soft as the west wind, pale as the moonbeams; something pensive as the little inn girls you see in Dutch pictures, who hand the stirrup-cup to a jack-booted wayfarer sitting straight as a stake on his tall white horse. Ah, the stirrup-cup, what a beautiful thing! A young woman on her doorstep, the lighted fire seen at the back of her room, supper ready, children sleeping; all the repose of a life of peace and quiet in one corner of the picture;

and there the man, still panting, but firm in his saddle, with twenty leagues ridden and thirty to ride; a mouthful of brandy, and good-bye. The night is dark that way, the weather threatening, the forest perilous; one moment the kind woman's eyes follow him, then, as she turns in again to her fire, she drops the glorious alms-gift of the poor: "God protect him."

Spark. Henry, if you were in love, you would be the happiest man alive.//

Fant. Love exists no longer, my dear friend. His foster-mother, Religion, has her breasts hanging like an old purse, with a great penny-piece in the heel of it. Love is a host that must be broken in twain at the foot of an altar, to be swallowed in a mutual kiss; there is no altar left, there is no love left. Long live nature; there is still wine. [*Drinks*].

Spark. You will get drunk.

Fant. I will get drunk; you have said it.

Spark. It is a little late for that.

Fant. What do you call late? Is noon late? Is midnight early? Where do you put the day? Spark, I beg of you, let us stay. Let us drink, chat, analyze, reason unreason, talk politics; let us devise governmental combinations; let us catch all the cockchafers that pass around this candle and put them in our pockets. Do you know that steam cannons are a fine thing in the way of philanthropy?

Spark. How do you mean?

Fant. There was once on a time a king who was very wise, and very, very happy——

Spark. What next?

Fant. The only thing wanting to his happi-

ness was to have children. He caused public prayers to be offered in all the mosques——

Spark. What are you driving at?

Fant. I am thinking of my beloved "Arabian Nights." That is how they all begin. Stop, Spark, I am tipsy. I must do something or other. Tra la, tra la. Come, let's get up.

[*A funeral passes.*]

Hallo! honest men, who is that you are burying? This is not the proper hour for burying.

The Bearers. We are burying St. Jean.

Fant. Saint Jean dead? The king's jester dead? Who has got his place? The Lord Chief-Justice?

The Bearers. His place is vacant; you may take it if you choose.

[*Exeunt.*]

Spark. There is an impertinence you fairly brought on yourself. What were you thinking of to stop these people?

Fant. There is no impertinence. It is a friend's advice that this man gave me, and I am going to follow it on the spot.

Spark. You are going to turn court jester?

Fant. This very night, if they will have me. Since I can not sleep at home, I wish to give myself the sight of the royal comedy that is to be played to-morrow, and that from the king's own box.

Spark. How clever! You will be recognized, and the lackeys will turn you out of doors. Are you not the late queen's godchild?

Fant. What a fool! I will put on a hump and red wig, like what Saint Jean wore, and no

one will recognize me, not if I had three dozen godmothers at my heels.

[*Knocking at a shop.*]

Ho! honest man, open to me, if you are not out, you and your wife and your puppies.

A Tailor. [*Opening the shop*]. What does your lordship desire?

Fant. Are you not the court tailor.

Tailor. At your service.

Fant. Was it you who used to make Saint Jean's clothes?

Tailor. Yes, sir.

Fant. You knew him? You know which side his hump was, how he curled his mustache, and what sort of wig he wore?

Tailor. Ho, ho! You are pleased to be merry, sir!

Fant. Man, I would not be merry; go into your back shop; and if you do not wish to be poisoned to-morrow in your coffee, meditate how to be silent as the grave about all that shall pass here.

[*Exit with Tailor. Spark follows.*]

SCENE III — *An inn on the road to Munich.*

Enter the Prince of Mantua and Marinoni.

Prince. Well, Colónel?

Mar. Your highness?

Prince. Well, Marinoni?

Mar. Melancholic, fanciful, a madcap, submissive to her father, a great lover of green peas.

Prince. Write that down; I never understand a thing clearly unless I have it in a sloping hand.

Mar. [*Writing*]. Melancho——

Prince. Write under your breath. Since dinner I have been dreaming of an important project.

Mar. Your highness, there is what you desire.

Prince. Good; I appoint you my intimate friend; I know no better writing than yours in all my kingdom. Sit down a little distance off. So you think, my friend, that the character of my future spouse, the princess, is secretly known to you?

Mar. Yes, your highness; I have traversed the surroundings of the palace, and these tablets contain the chief heads of the different conversations in which I joined.

Prince. [*Viewing himself*]. It seems to me that I am powdered like a man of the lowest class.

Mar. The coat is splendid.

Prince. What would you say, Marinoni, if you saw your master don a plain olive frock-coat?

Mar. His highness mocks my credulity.

Prince. No, Colonel. Learn that your master is the most romantic of men.

Mar. Romantic, your highness?

Prince. Yes, my friend (I granted you this title), the important project that I meditate is one unheard of in my family. I propose to arrive at the king, my father-in-law's court, in the garb of a plain aide-de-camp; it is not

enough to have sent a man of my household to collect public rumors concerning the future Princess of Mantua (and that man, Marinoni, is yourself); I wish further to observe with my own eyes.

Mar. Is this true, your highness?

Prince. Do not stand aghast. A man like me should have as intimate friend none but a vast and enterprising spirit.

Mar. One thing alone seems to me to oppose your highness' design.

Prince. What?

Mar. The idea of such a masquerade could only belong to the glorious prince who rules us. But if my gracious sovereign is confounded with the staff, to whom will the King of Bavaria do the honors of a splendid banquet which is to take place in the great gallery?

Prince. You are right; if I disguise myself, some one must take my place. That is impossible, Marinoni; I had not thought of that.

Mar. Why, impossible, your highness?

Prince. I may certainly lower the princely dignity as far as the rank of colonel; but how can you think that I would consent to elevate to my rank and name any man, be he who he may? Besides, do you think that my future father-in-law would forgive me?

Mar. The king passes for a man of much sense and wit, with an agreeable humor.

Prince. Oh! it is not without reluctance that I give up my project. To penetrate into this new court without pomp or noise, to observe everything, to approach the princess under an assumed name, perhaps to win her hand! Oh!

I grow dizzy! It is impossible. Marinoni, my friend, try on my state dress; I can not resist it.

Mar. [*Bowing low*]. Your highness!

Prince. Do you think future ages will soon forget such a circumstance?

Mar. Never, my gracious prince!

Prince. Come, and try on my coat.

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT THE SECOND

SCENE I — *Garden of the King of Bavaria.*

Enter Elsbeth and her Governess.

Gov. My poor eyes have wept for him, wept a torrent of rain.

Elsb. You are so kind. I loved Saint Jean, too; he was so witty. He was no common jester.

Gov. To think that he departed, poor fellow, the very day before your betrothal. He who spoke, dinner and supper, of nothing but you as long as the day lasted. Such a lively, merry fellow, too, that he made ugliness lovable, and that eyes, in their own despite, could not choose but follow him.

Elsb. Don't talk to me of my marriage; that is a worse mishap yet.

Gov. Don't you know that the Prince of Mantua comes to-day? Folk say he is an Amadis.

Elsb. What is that you say, my dear? He is horrible and idiotic, and everybody here knows that already.

Gov. Really; I had been told he was an Amadis.

Elsb. I did not ask for an Amadis, my dear; but it is a cruel thing sometimes to be nothing but a king's daughter. My father is the best of men; the marriage he is arranging assures the peace of his kingdom; he will find his recompense in people's blessing; but as for me, alas! I shall have his, and that is all——

Gov. How sadly you speak!

Elsb. If I refused the prince, war would soon be set on foot once more; it is a pity these treaties of peace are always signed with tears. I wish I could be a strong-minded woman, and resign myself to wed the first-comer when policy demands it. To be the mother of a people may console high hearts, but not weak brains. I am only a poor dreamer; perhaps the blame lies with your romances, for you have one always in your pocket.

Gov. Mercy! never speak of it.

Elsb. I have small skill of life and many dreams.

Gov. If the Prince of Mantua is such as you say, God will not let this affair be concluded, I am certain.

Elsb. You think so! God leaves men to themselves, my poor friend, and scarcely heeds our prayers more than the bleatings of a sheep.

Gov. I am sure if you refused the prince, your father would put no constraint on you.

Elsb. Certainly he would not constrain me, and that is why I sacrifice myself. Would you have me go to my father and bid him forget his word, and with one stroke of the pen erase his

honorable name from a contract that makes thousands happy? What matter that it makes one woman wretched? I let my good father be a good king.

Gov. Ee! Ee! [*Cries*].

Elsb. Don't cry over it, my kind girl; you might perhaps make me cry myself; and a royal betrothed must not have red eyes. Don't afflict yourself over all this. After all I shall be a queen, perhaps that is amusing; perhaps I shall acquire a taste for my jewels—how can I tell? for my coaches and my new court. Happily marriage brings a princess something else besides a husband. Perhaps I shall find happiness folded away under my trousseau.

Gov. You are a perfect paschal lamb.

Elsb. Come, my dear, let us begin anyhow by laughing at this; we shall be free to cry when the time comes for tears. They say the Prince of Mantua is the most laughable creature in the world.

Gov. If Saint Jean were here!

Elsb. Ah, Saint Jean! Saint Jean!

Gov. You were very fond of him, my child!

Elsb. It is odd; his wit bound me to him with imperceptible threads that seemed to come from my heart; his perpetual mockery of my romantic ideas delighted me beyond measure, whilst I can scarcely tolerate many a person who is just of my own way of thinking. I don't know what it was about him, something in his eyes, in his motions, in the way he took his snuff. He was a strange man; as he spoke to me delicious pictures passed before my eyes; his speech gave

life, as if by enchantment to the unlikeliest things.

Gov. He was a real Triboulet.

Elsb. I don't know about that; but he was a gem of wit.

Gov. Here is a hurry-scurry of pages. I think the prince will not be long in making his appearance; you should go back to the palace to dress.

Elsb. I entreat of you, leave me another quarter of an hour. Go and get ready what I need. Alas! my dear, I have little time left for dreams now.

Gov. Good heavens! Is it possible that this marriage should be accomplished, if you dislike it; a father sacrifice his daughter! The king would be a perfect Jephtha if he did that.

Elsb. Don't speak evil of my father. Go, dear, and look me out what I want.

[*Exit Governess.*]

Elsb. [*Alone*]. It seems to me there is some one behind those shrubs. Is it the ghost of my poor jester that I see sitting in the meadow among the corn-flowers? Answer me; who are you? What are you about there pulling those flowers?

[*She advances toward the mound.*]

Fant. [*Sitting, dressed as a jester, hump and wig*]. I am an honest flower-picker, who wishes good day to your fair face.

Elsb. What is the meaning of this accoutrement? Who are you that you should come and travesty a man I loved with that great wig of yours? Are you apprenticed to buffoonery?

Fant. So please your most serene highness, I am the king's new jester; the major-domo has accorded me a favorable reception. Since yesterday evening the scullions have become my patrons, and I am modestly picking flowers till the wit comes to me.

Elsb. It seems to me highly questionable whether that is a flower you will ever pluck——

Fant. Why? Wit may visit a man who is old just as it might a girl. Sometimes it is so nice a matter to tell a witty sally from a piece of flat stupidity. Speak plenty; there you have the main point; the worst shot may hit the bull's-eye with a pistol, if he fires seven hundred and eighty rounds a minute, just as well as the most skilful marksman who only fires his one or two well aimed. I only ask to be fed suitably to the girth of my belly, and I will watch my shadow in the sunlight to see if my wig is growing.

Elsb. So that here you are, clad in Saint Jean's cast-offs. You do well to speak of your shadow; so long as you wear the costume, it will always, I believe, be liker him than you are.

Fant. At this moment I am composing an elegy that will decide my fate.

Elsb. In what sort?

Fant. It will prove clearly that I am the head man of the universe, or else, indeed, it will be worth nothing. I am busy turning the universe upside down to get it into an acrostic. Moon, sun and stars fight for a place in my rhymes, like schoolboys at the entry of a melodrama play-house.

Elsb. Poor fellow! What a business you have taken in hand—to be witty at so much an hour! Have you no arms or legs, and would you not do better to plow and harrow earth than your own brain?

Fant. Poor child! What a business you have taken in hand—to marry a fool you never saw! Have you no head or heart, and would you not do better to sell your dresses than sell your body?

Elsb. This is bold, sir new-comer.

Fant. What do you call this flower, pray?

Elsb. A tulip. What are you for proving?

Fant. A red tulip or a blue tulip?

Elsb. Blue, as it appears to me.

Fant. Not a bit of it; it is a red tulip.

Elsb. Do you want to put a new-fashioned coat on an old adage? You do not need that, to tell me that about tastes and colors there is no disputing.

Fant. I am not disputing; I tell you this tulip is a red tulip, and yet I allow it is blue.

Elsb. How do you settle that?

Fant. Like your marriage. What man under the sun can say whether he was born blue or red? The very tulips know nothing of it; gardeners and lawyers make such extraordinary grafts that apples turn pumpkins, and that thistles leave the ass's mouth to be drowned in sauce on a bishop's silver plate. This tulip you see, no doubt expected to be red; but it was married; it is quite surprised at being blue; this is how the whole world is metamorphosed under the hands of man; and poor nature, my lady, must laugh in her own face heartily from time to time when she

surveys in her lakes and her seas this eternal masquerade of hers. Do you believe that was how the rose smelt in Moses' paradise? It only smelt of green hay. The rose is a daughter of civilization, a marchioness, just like you or I.

Elsb. The hawthorne's pale flower may turn to a rose, and a thistle to an artichoke; but one flower can not be made into another; so what matter to nature? You can not change her; you beautify her or you kill. The meanest violet would die rather than yield if some one wanted, through artificial means, to alter its form by one stamen.

Fant. That is why I think more of a violet than of a king's daughter.

Elsb. There are certain things which even jesters have no right to mock at; bear that in mind. If you listened to my conversation with my governess, mind your ears.

Fant. Not my ears, but my tongue. You miss the sense; your words have the wrong sense.

Elsb. Pun me no puns, if you would earn your money, and avoid comparing me to tulips if you don't want to earn something else.

Fant. Who knows? A pun consoles many griefs, and playing with words is as good a way as any other to play with thoughts, actions and creatures. All in this world below is one great joke, and it is as hard to read the looks of a child four years old as to construe the rubbish of three modern melodramas.

Elsb. You seem to me to look out on the world through a somewhat changing prism.

Fant. We all have our spectacles, but no one

can tell to a shade the color of the glass. Who can tell me to a nicety whether I am happy or unhappy, good or bad, sad or merry, dull or witty?

Elsb. You are ugly at least; so much is certain.

Fant. Not surer than your beauty. Here comes your father with your future husband. Who can say whether you will marry him?

[*Exit.*]

Elsb. Since I can not avoid the interview with the Prince of Mantua, I shall do as well to go to meet him.

[*Enter the King, Marinoni in Prince's costume, and the Prince dressed as aide-de-camp.*]

King. Prince, here is my daughter. Pardon her gardening dress. Here you are under the roof of a citizen who governs other citizens, and our etiquette is as indulgent toward ourselves as toward them.

Mar. Allow me to kiss this charming hand, madam, if it be not too great a favor for my lips.

Princess. Your highness will excuse me if I go into the palace. I shall see your highness, I presume, in a more fitting manner at to-night's levée.

[*Exit.*]

Prince. The princess is right; here is a divine modesty.

King. [*To Marinoni*]. Who is this aide-de-camp, pray, who dogs you like your shadow? It is intolerable to me to hear him vent an in-

But the answer dislikes me. Can she have a false, hard heart? It would be well to sound the matter dexterously.

[*Exit.*]

SCENE III—*An antechamber.*

Fantasio lying on a carpet.

Fant. What a delicious life is this jester's! I was tipsy yesterday, I think, when I assumed this costume, and presented myself at the palace; but upon my word, never did sound reason inspire me with an idea that was worth this act of folly. I make my appearance, and here I am, accepted, petted, put on the books, and, better still, forgotten. I come and go in this palace as if I had lived in it all my life. I met the king a moment ago; he had not so much as the curiosity to look at me. His jester being dead, they told him, "Sire, here is another!" It is admirable. Thank God, there is my mind at rest; I can play all the pranks possible without a word said to prevent me. I am one of the King of Bavaria's domestic animals, and if I choose, so long as I keep my hump and wig, they will let me live between a spaniel and a guinea-fowl, till the day of my death. Meanwhile my creditors may break their noses against my door at their leisure. I am just as much in safety here under this wig as I should be in the West Indies. Is not that the princess I see through this glass in the next room? She is putting a few touches to her wedding veil; two long tears are

trickling down her cheeks; look, there is one detaching itself and falling on her breast like a pearl. Poor child! I overheard her talk with the governess this morning (on my faith, it was by accident) I was sitting on the turf without any purpose but to sleep. Now, there she is, crying, and never suspecting that I see her again. Ah! were I a student of rhetoric, how profound would be my reflections on this crowned misery, this poor ewe lamb, around whose neck they are tying a pink ribbon to lead her to the slaughter-house! That little girl is romantic, no doubt; it is a cruel trial to her to wed a man she does not know. Yet she sacrifices herself in silence. How capricious fortune is! Needs must I get drunk, meet Saint Jean's funeral, assume his garb and his place—play, in short, the maddest trick that ever was played, just to come and through this glass see falling the only two tears perhaps that the child will shed on her unhappy wedding veil.

[*Exit.*]

SCENE IV—*A garden walk.*

The Prince. Marinoni.

Prince. You are no better than a fool, Colonel—

Mar. Your highness labors under a most painful error in regard to me.

Prince. You are an arch blockhead. Could you not prevent that? I entrust to you the greatest project which has been conceived these

God knows how many years, and you, my best friend, my most loyal servant, pile up blunder upon blunder. No, no; it is all very fine talking—that is in no way to be forgiven.

Mar. How could I prevent your highness from drawing down upon yourself the inconveniences which are the necessary consequence of the part you are supposed to play? You order me to take your name and behave like a real Prince of Mantua. Can I prevent the King of Bavaria from offering an affront to my aide-de-camp? You were wrong to interfere in our business.

Prince. I should like to see an upstart like you take upon himself to give me orders.

Mar. Reflect, your highness, that never-the-less I must be the prince or must be the aide-de-camp. It is by your order I act.

Prince. Tell me before the whole court that I am an impertinent fellow because I wanted to kiss the princess' hand! I am ready to declare war upon him and return to my States, to put myself at the head of my armies.

Mar. Do remember, your highness, that this sorry compliment was addressed to the aide-de-camp and not to the prince. Do you claim to be respected in that disguise?

Prince. That will do. Give me back my coat.

Mar. [*Taking off the coat.*] If my sovereign makes a point of it, I am ready to die for him.

Prince. Upon my word, I don't know what conclusion to come to. On the one hand I am furious at what happens to me, and on the other I am miserable at giving up my plan. The

princess appears to reply not with indifference to the double meanings with which I unremittingly pursue her. Already I have gone so far two or three times as to whisper her things you would not believe. Come, let us think it all over.

Mar. [*Holding the coat.*] What shall I do, your highness?

Prince. Put it on, put it on; and let us go into the palace.

.[Exeunt.]

SCENE V

Princess Elsbeth. The King.

King. Daughter, you must give me a frank answer to my question: Do you dislike this marriage?

Elsb. It is for you, sire, to answer it yourself. I like it if you like it; I dislike it if you dislike it.

King. The prince appeared to me to be a common-place man, of whom it is hard to find anything to say. His aide-de-camp's silliness is the only thing that damages him in my opinion. As for himself, he is perhaps a kind prince, but he is not a man of breeding. There is nothing in him that attracts me or repels me. What can I say to you on this subject? The hearts of women have secrets that I can not know; sometimes they make such strange heroes for themselves; they seize so oddly upon one or two sides in the nature of the man presented to them

that it is impossible to judge for them, when one is not guided by some obvious point. Tell me plainly, then, what you think of your betrothed.

Elsb. I think that he is Prince of Mantua, and that war will begin again to-morrow between you and him if I do not marry him.

King. That is certain, my child.

Elsb. I think, accordingly, that I will marry him, and that the war will be ended.

King. May the blessings of my people give thanks on thy father's behalf! Ah, my sweet daughter! I should be happy in this alliance, but I would fain not see that sadness in these fair blue eyes give the lie to their resignation. Reflect a few days yet.

[*Exit. Enter Fantasio.*]

Elsb. There you are, poor lad! How do you like your life here?

Fant. As a bird its freedom.

Elsb. You might have answered better, as a bird its cage. This palace is a fine cage enough, yet it is one.

Fant. The dimensions of a palace or a room do no make man more or less free. The body moves where it can; imagination sometimes spreads its wings as wide as heaven in a dungeon scarce bigger than my hand.

Elsb. So you are a happy fool, then?

Fant. Very happy. I hold conversation with the puppies and the scullions. There is a cur only so high in the kitchen, who said charming things to me.

Elsb. In what language?

Fant. In the purest style. He would not

make a single mistake in grammar in the space of a year.

Elsb. Could I hear a few words in this style?

Fant. By my word, I would not have you to; it is a tongue that is peculiar to him. It is only curs that speak it; the trees and the very ears of wheat know it too; but kings' daughters don't know it. When is your wedding to be?

Elsb. In a few days it will be all over.

Fant. That is to say, it will all be begun. I mean to offer you a present from my own hand.

Elsb. What present. You make me anxious.

Fant. I mean to offer for your acceptance a pretty little stuffed canary bird, that sings like a nightingale.

Elsb. How can he sing if he is stuffed?

Fant. It sings to perfection.

Elsb. On my word, you show a rare persistence in your mockery of me.

Fant. Not at all. My canary has a little musical box in his stomach. You touch gently a little spring under the left claw, and he sings all the new operas exactly like Mademoiselle Grisi.

Elsb. It is an invention of your brain, doubtless?

Fant. My no means. It is a court canary; there are plenty of very well brought-up little girls who work in precisely the same manner. They have a little spring under their left arm—a nice little spring of fine diamond, like a dandy's watch. The tutor or governess sets the spring working, and immediately you see the lips

open with the most gracious smile. A charming cascade of honeyed words issues with the softest murmuring, and all the social decencies, like light-foot nymphs forthwith fall a-tripping on tiptoe around the marvelous fountain. The aspirant opens dumbfounded eyes; the company whisper indulgently, and the father, filled with a secret satisfaction, proudly contemplates his golden shoe-buckles.

Elsb. You seem to recur willingly to certain subjects. Tell me, fool, what can the poor young women have done to you to make you satirize them so light heartedly? Can not regard for any duty find favor in your eyes?

Fant. I have a deal of respect for ugliness. That is why I respect myself so profoundly.

Elsb. You seem sometimes to know more than your words say. Where do you come from, then, and who are you, that you who have been here but one day can already fathom mysteries which princes themselves will never suspect? Are your follies aimed at me, or are you talking at random?

Fant. I am talking at random. Random and I are old friends.

Elsb. Indeed! He seems to have told you what you had no business to know. I am ready to believe that you spy upon my actions and my words.

Fant. Heaven knows! What matter is it to you?

Elsb. More than you can fancy. A moment ago in this room, while I was putting on my veil, I suddenly heard a step behind the tapestry. I am greatly mistaken if the step was not yours.

Fant. Be sure that that will always be between me and your pocket-handkerchief. I am no more indiscreet than inquisitive. What pleasure could your vexations give me? What vexation could your pleasures give me? You are this; I am that. You are young, and I am old. Fair, and I am ugly. Rich, and I am poor. You see plainly that we have nothing in common. What does it matter to you that chance on his grand highway has made two wheels cross that do not follow the same rut, and which can not mark the same dust? Is it my fault if, while I slept, one of your tears fell on my cheek?

Elsb. You speak to me in the guise of a man I loved. That is why I listen to you in my own despite. My eyes think they see Saint Jean; but perhaps you are only a spy.

Fant. What good would that do me? Suppose it were true that your marriage cost you a few tears; suppose that I had learned the fact by chance, what should I gain by going to blab of it? No one would give me a pistole for the news, and no one would put you in the Black Hole. I understand very well that it must be a great bore to marry the Prince of Mantua; but, after all, it is not I who undertook it. To-morrow, or the day after, you will be off to Mantua with your wedding dress, and I shall be here still on this stool in my old hose. Why would you have me bear you a grudge? I have no reason to desire your death. You never lent me money.

Elsb. But if chance made you see what I would have hidden, should I not turn you out of doors for fear of a fresh accident?

Fant. Do you mean to compare me to a tragedy confidante? And are you afraid that I should follow your shadow declaiming? Do not send me away, I beg. I amuse myself excellently here. Stay; there is your governess coming up with a pocketful of mysteries. The proof that I will not eavesdrop is, that I am off to the pantry to eat a plover's wing, which the major-domo set apart for his wife.

[*Exit.*]

Gov. [*Entering.*] Do you know a terrible thing, my dear Elsbeth?

Elsb. What do you mean? You are trembling all over.

Gov. The prince is not the prince, nor the aide-de-camp either. It is a perfect fairy tale.

Elsb. What is this comedy of errors?

Gov. Hush! hush! It is one of the prince's own officers who has just told me. The Prince of Mantua is a regular Alma Viva. He is in disguise, and hidden among his aides-de-camp. No doubt he sought to see you, and make acquaintance in fairy fashion. He is in disguise, worthy gentleman. He is disguised like Lindor. The man who was presented to you as your future husband is only an aide-de-camp named Marinoni.

Elsb. This is impossible.

Gov. It is certain—a thousand times certain. The worthy man is disguised; it is impossible to recognize him. It is an extraordinary thing.

Elsb. You have this from an officer, you say?

Gov. From an officer of the prince. You can question him yourself.

Elsb. And he did not show you the true Prince of Mantua among the aides-de-camp?

Gov. Consider that he was trembling himself, poor man, at the things he was telling me. He only entrusted me with his secret because he wishes to be agreeable to you, and because he knew I would let you know. As for Marinoni, that is positive; but for what concerns the real prince, he did not point him out.

Elsb. If that were true, it would give me some matter for thought. Come, bring this officer to me.

[*Enter a Page.*]

Gov. What is the matter, Flamel? You appear out of breath.

Page. Ah, madam! It is enough to kill one with laughing. I dare not speak before your highness.

Elsb. Speak out; what more news is there?

Page. At the moment when the Prince of Mantua was entering the court on horseback at the head of his staff, his wig was carried up into the sky and disappeared on a sudden.

Elsb. What is this all about? What idiocy!

Page. Madam, I wish I may die if it is not the truth. The wig was carried up into the air at the point of a hook. We found it in the pantry beside a broken bottle; no one knows who played this trick. But the duke is not less furious for that, and he has sworn that unless the author of the prank is punished with death, he will declare war on the king, your father, and spread blood and fire everywhere.

Elsb. Come and hear the whole story, dear.
My gravity begins to forsake me.

[*Enter another Page.*]

Elsb. Well—what news?

Page. Madam, the king's jester is in prison;
it was he who pulled off the prince's wig.

Elsb. The jester in prison? And by the
prince's orders?

Page. Yes, your highness.

Elsb. Come, mother dear, I must speak.

[*Exit with Governess.*]

SCENE VI

The Prince. Marinoni.

Prince. No, no; let me unmask. It is time
I should burst upon them. It shall not be al-
lowed to pass thus. Blood and fire! A royal
wig at the end of a hook and line! Are we
among barbarians in the deserts of Siberia? Is
there still any civilization or decency left under
the sun? I foam with rage, my eyes are starting
out of my head.

Mar. You ruin all by this violence.

Prince. This father, too, this King of Bavaria,
this monarch exalted in all last year's almanacs!
This man whose exterior is so seemly, who ex-
presses himself in such measured terms, and
then falls a-laughing at the sight of his son-in-
law's wig flying in the air! For, after all, I ad-
mit it was your wig, Marinoni, that was pulled
off; but still, was it not the wig of the Prince of
Mantua, since it is he folk think they see in you?

When I think that had it been I myself in flesh and blood, my wig would perhaps— Ah! there is a providence. When God suddenly sent me the notion to travesty myself, when that lightning-flash traversed my thoughts, "I must travesty myself," this fatal event was foreseen by destiny. He it is who saved from the most unendurable affront the head that rules my peoples. But, by heaven! all shall be known. This treason against my dignity has been too long. Since the majesties, human and divine, are pitilessly violated and mangled; since the ideas of good and evil exist no longer among mankind; since the king of several thousands of human beings bursts into laughter like a groom at sight of a wig, Marinoni, give me back my coat.

Mar. [*Taking off the coat*]. If my sovereign commands, I am ready to suffer a thousand tortures for him.

Prince. I know your devotion. Come, I am going to tell the king my mind in proper terms.

Mar. You refuse the princess' hand? Yet she ogled you unmistakably all through dinner.

Prince. You think so? I am lost in an abyss of perplexities. Come, anyhow, let us go to the king.

Mar. [*Holding the coat*]. What am I to do, your highness?

Prince. Put it on again for a moment. You shall return it to me directly; they will be far more petrified if they hear me take the tone that befits me in this dark-colored morning coat.

SCENE VII—*A prison.**Fantasio.* [Sol.]

Fant. I don't know whether there is a providence, but it is amusing to believe in one. Never-the-less, here was a poor little princess going to be forced into a marriage with a provincial square-toes, on whose head chance had dropped a crown, like the tortoise an eagle let fall on Æschylus. All preparations were made, tapers lit, bridegroom powdered, and the poor little girl's confession made. She had dried the two charming tears I saw fall this morning. Nothing was wanting but two or three priestly mummeries to formally accomplish the misfortune of her life. In all this was involved the fortune of two kingdoms, the tranquility of two peoples; and needs must I have the fancy to disguise myself as a hunchback, to come and fuddle myself again in our good king's buttery, and fish up at the end of a string his dear ally's wig. Upon my word, when I am drunk I believe there is something superhuman about me. Here is the marriage off, and the whole question re-opened. The Prince of Mantua has demanded my head in exchange for his wig. The King of Bavaria considered the penalty a trifle severe, and only agreed to imprison me. The Prince of Mantua, thanks be to God, is such a dolt that he would rather be chopped in pieces than yield an inch. So the princess remains single, at least for this bout. If there is not in that the subject for an epic poem in twelve cantos, I am no judge.

Pope and Boileau have written admirable verses on subjects far less important. O, were I a poet! How I would paint the scene of that wig fluttering in the wind! But the man who is capable of such exploits disdains to write of them. So posterity must do without it.

[*He falls asleep. Enter Elsbeth and her Governess, lamp in hand.*]

Elsb. He is asleep. Close the door gently.

Gov. Look, there is not a doubt about it. He has taken off his false wig, and his deformity has disappeared along with it. Look at him, such as he is, such as his people behold him on his triumphal car. It is the noble Prince of Mantua.

Elsb. Yes, it is he. Then my curiosity is satisfied. I wanted to see his countenance, that is all. Let me bend over him.

[*Taking the lamp.*]

Psyche, beware of your drop of oil.

Gov. He is as beautiful as a god.

Elsb. Why did you give me so many romances and fairy tales to read? Why did you sow my poor thoughts so thick with strange, mysterious flowers?

Gov. How you palpitate, a-tip-toe on your little feet!

Elsb. He is waking. Let us be off.

Fant. [*Waking*]. Is it a dream? I have hold of the hem of a white dress.

Elsb. Loose me, let me go—

Fant. You, princess? If it is the pardon of the king's jester you bring me so divinely, let me put on my hump and my wig. It is the work of a moment.

Gov. Ah, prince! How ill it becomes you to receive us thus! Do not resume that garb; we know all.

Fant. Prince? Where do you see one?

Gov. What use in dissembling?

Fant. I do not dissemble the least in the world. What chance makes you call me a prince?

Gov. I know my duty toward your highness.

Fant. Madam, I entreat you to explain to me this good lady's words. Is there really some whimsical mistake, or am I the object of a joke?

Elsb. Why ask, when you yourself are the mocker?

Fant. Do I chance to be a prince, then? Can there be some doubt cast on my mother's--- honor?

Elsb. Who are you, if you are not the Prince of Mantua?

Fant. My name is Fantasio. I am a burgher of Munich.

[Shows a letter.]

Elsb. A burgher of Munich? And why are you disguised? What are you doing here?

Fant. Madam, I entreat your pardon.

[Falling on his knees.]

Elsb. What is the meaning of this? Rise and leave this place? I remit in your favor a punishment that perhaps it may be you deserve. What prompted this action of yours?

Fant. I can not tell the motive that led me here.

Elsb. You can not tell? And yet I will know it.

Fant. Pardon me, I dare not avow it.

Gov. Let us go, Elsbeth; do not expose yourself to hear words unworthy of your ears. This man is either a thief or an impertinent fellow who will speak to you of love.

Elsb. I will know the reason that caused you to assume this garb.

Fant. I entreat of you, spare me.

Elsb. No, no! Speak, or I close this door on you for ten years.

Fant. Madam, I am head over ears in debt; my creditors have got a warrant out against me. At this very moment my furniture is sold, and were I not in this prison, I should be in another. I was to be arrested yesterday at nightfall. Not knowing where to pass the night, nor how to avoid the bailiff's pursuit, I conceived the idea of donning this costume, and seeking refuge at the king's feet. If you restore me to liberty, I shall be taken by the shoulder. My uncle is a miser, who lives on potatoes and radishes, and leaves me to die of hunger in all the public houses of the kingdom. Since you must know it, I owe twenty thousand crowns.

Elsb. Is all this true?

Fant. If I lie, may I pay them.

[*A noise of horse is heard.*]

Gov. There are horses passing; it is the king in person. If I could signal to a page.

[*Calling out of window.*]

Ho! Flamel, where are you going?

Page. [*Outside.*] The Prince of Mantua is going to depart.

Gov. The Prince of Mantua?

Page. Yes; war is declared. There was a terrible scene between him and the king before all the court, and the princess' marriage is broken off.

Elsb. Do you hear that, Monsieur Fantasio? You have put a stop to my marriage.

Gov. Great heavens! The Prince of Mantua is going, and I shall not have seen him.

Elsb. If war is declared, how sad!

Fant. Sad, you call it, your highness? Would you sooner have a husband who makes his wig a *casus belli*? Well, madam, if war is declared, we shall know what to do with our hands. The loungers of our promenades will put on their uniforms. I myself will take my shot-gun, if it is not sold yet. We shall go for a tour in Italy, and if ever you enter Mantua, it shall be as a real Queen, without need of other candles than our swords.

Elsb. Fantasio, will you stay as my father's jester? I will pay your twenty thousand crowns.

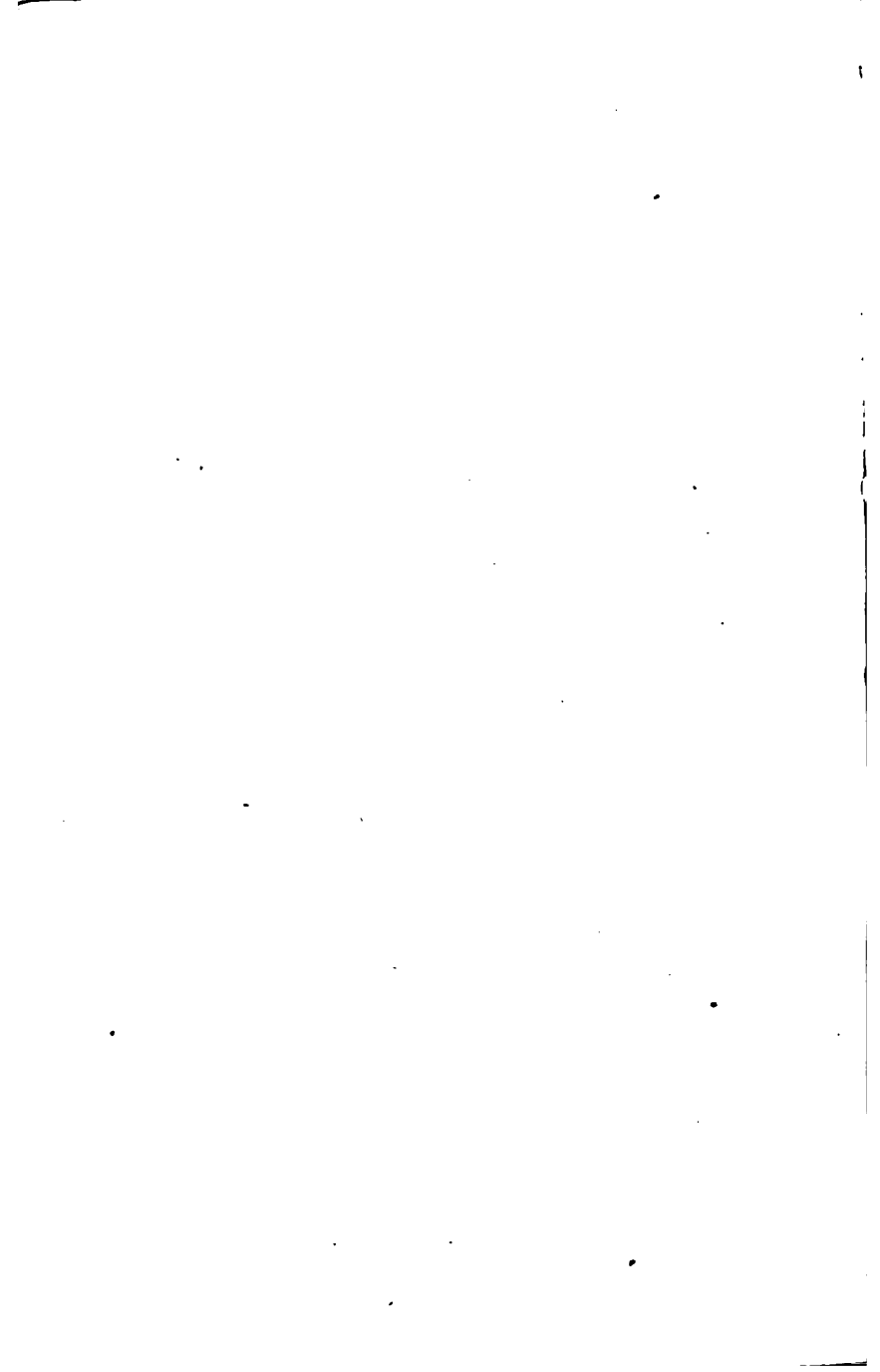
Fant. I should accept with all my heart; but on my word, if I were forced to it, I would jump out of the window to make my escape one of these days.

Elsb. Why? You see Saint Jean is dead; a jester is an absolute necessity——

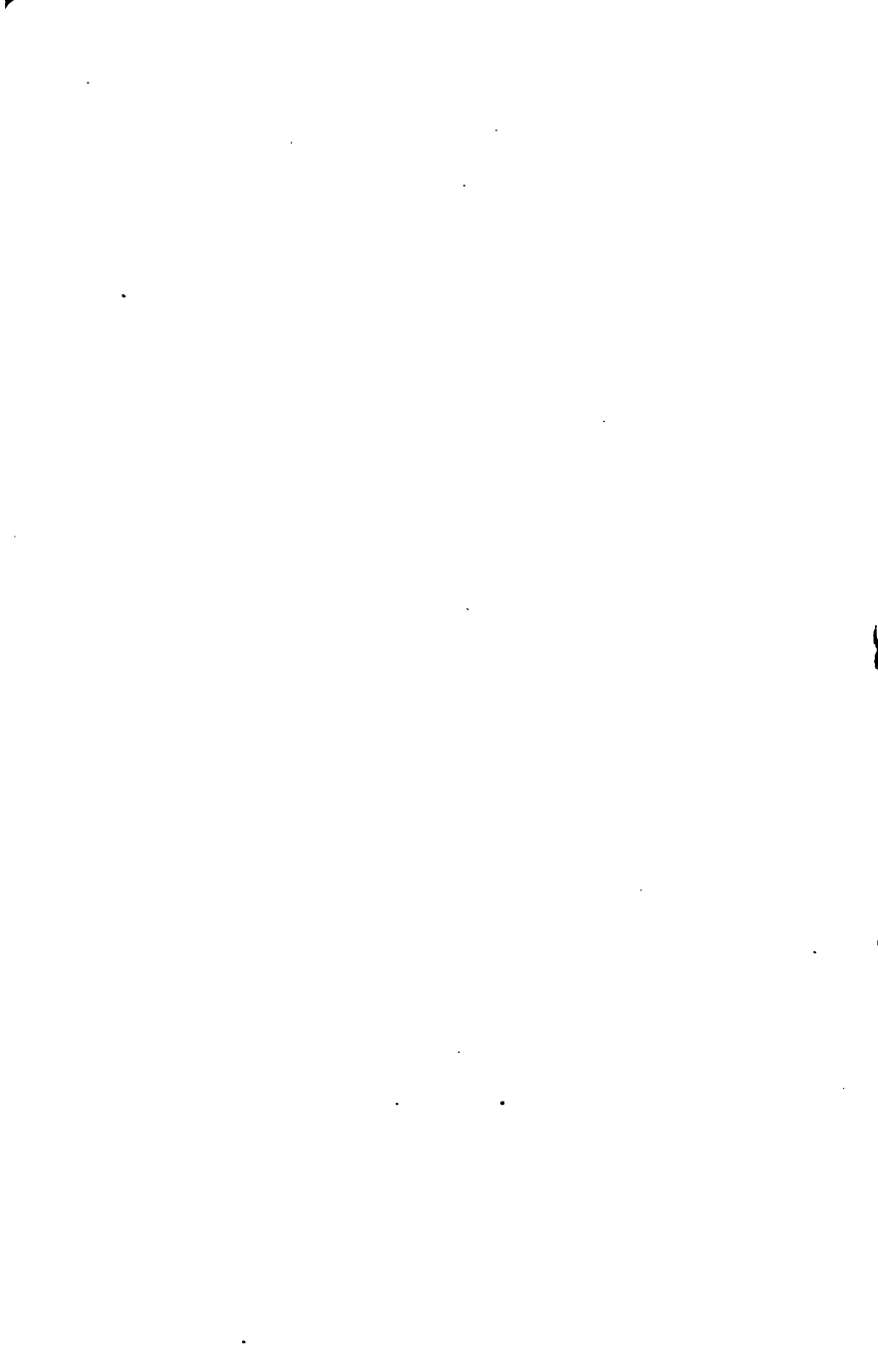
Fant. I prefer that trade to any other; but I can not work at any trade. If you think that I deserve twenty thousand crowns for ridding you of the Prince of Mantua, give them to me, and don't pay my debts. A gentleman without debts could not show his face anywhere. It never entered my mind to be out of debt.

Elsb. Very well, you shall have them; but take the keys of my garden. The day you are weary of being hunted by your creditors, come and hide among the corn-flowers, where I found you this morning. Be careful to bring your wig and your motley coat. Never appear before me without this counterfeit figure and these silver bells, for it was so you won my favor. You shall turn into my jester again for such time as shall please you, and then you shall go about your business. Now you may be off; the door is open.

Gov. Is it possible that the Prince of Mantua should be gone without my seeing him?



NO TRIFLING WITH LOVE.



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

THE BARON.

PERDICAN—*His Son.*

• MASTER BLAZIUS—*Perdican's Tutor.*

MASTER BRIDAINÉ—*Parish Priest.*

• CAMILLE—*The Baron's Niece.*

DAME PLUCHE—*Her Governess.*

ROSETTE—*Foster-Sister of Camille.*

Peasants, Servants, etc.

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NO TRIFLING WITH LOVE

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

ACT THE FIRST

SCENE I

A Village Green before the Chateau.

The Chorus. Gently rocked on his prancing mule, Master Blazius advances through the blossoming cornflowers; his clothes are new, his writing-case hangs by his side. Like a chubby baby on a pillow, he rolls about on top of his protuberant belly, and, with his eyes half shut, mumbles a paternoster into his double chin. Welcome, Master Blazius; you come for the vintage time in the semblance of an ancient amphora.

Master Blazius. Let those who wish to learn an important piece of news first of all bring me here a glass of new wine.

Chorus. Here is our biggest bowl; drink, Master Blazius; the wine is good; you shall speak afterward.

Blaz. You are to know, my children, that young Perdican, our seigneur's son, has just attained his majority, and that he has taken his doctor's degree at Paris. This very day he comes home to the chateau with his mouth full of such fine, flowery phrases, that three-quarters of the time you don't know how to answer him. His charming person is just all one golden book; he can not see a blade of grass on the ground without giving you the Latin name for it; and when it blows or when it rains he tells you plainly the reason why. You will open your eyes as wide as the gate there to see him unroll one of the scrolls he has illuminated in ink of all colors, all with his own hands, and not a word said to anybody. In short, he is a polished diamond from top to toe, and that is the message I am bringing to my lord, the baron. You perceive that does some credit to me, who have been his tutor since he was four years old; so now, my good friends, bring a chair and let me just get off this mule without breaking my neck; the beast is a trifle restive, and I should not be sorry to drink another drop before going in.

Chorus. Drink, Master Blazius, and recover your wits. We saw little Perdican born, and once you said he is coming, we did not need to hear such a long story about him. May we find the child in the grown man's heart.

Blaz. On my word, the bowl is empty; I did not think I had drunk it all. Good-bye! As I

trotted along the road I got ready two or three unpretending phrases that will please my lord; I will go and pull the bell.

[*Exit.*]

Chorus. Sorely jolted on her panting ass, Dame Pluche mounts the hill. Her frightened groom belabors the poor animal with all his might, while it shakes its head, with a thistle in its jaws. Her long, lean legs jerk with anger, whilst her bony hands string off her beads. Good day to you, Dame Pluche; you come, like the fever, with the wind that yellows the woods.

Dame Pluche. A glass of water, you rabble; a glass of water and a little vinegar.

Chorus. Where do you come from, Pluche, my darling? Your false hair is covered with dust; there's a wig spoiled; and your chaste gown is tucked up to your venerable garters.

Pluche. Know, boors, that the fair Camille, your master's niece, arrives at the chateau to-day. She left the convent by my lord's express orders to come and enter on possession of her mother's rich estate, in due time and place, as is meet to be done. Her education, thank God, is finished, and those who see her will have the fortune to inhale the fragrance of a glorious flower of goodness and piety. Never was there anything so pure, so lamblike, so dovelike, as that dear novice; the Lord God of heaven be her guide. Amen. Stand aside, you rabble; I fancy my legs are swollen.

Chorus. Smooth yourself down, honest Pluche, and when you pray to God, ask for rain; our corn is as dry as your shanks.

Pluche. You have brought me water in a bowl that smells of the kitchen. Give me a hand to help me down. You are a pack of ill-mannered boobies.

[*Exit.*]

Chorus. Let us put on our Sunday best, and wait till the baron sends for us. Either I am greatly mistaken, or there is some jolly merry-making toward to-day.

SCENE II—*The Baron's Drawing-Room.*

Enter the Baron, Master Bridaine and Master Blazius.

The Baron. Master Bridaine, you are my friend, let me introduce Master Blazius, my son's tutor. My son yesterday, at eight minutes past twelve, noon, was exactly twenty-one years old. He has taken his degree, and passed in four subjects. Master Blazius, I introduce to you Master Bridaine, priest of the parish, and my friend.

Blaz. [*Bowing*]. Passed in four subjects, your lordship: Literature, philosophy, Roman law, canon law.

Baron. Go to your room, my dear Blazius; my son will not be long in appearing. Arrange your dress a little, and return when the bell rings.

[*Exit Master Blazius.*]

Brid. Shall I tell you what I am thinking, my lord? Your son's tutor smells strong of wine.

Baron. It is impossible!

Brid. I am as sure as I am alive. He spoke to me very close just now. He smells fearfully of wine.

Baron. No more of this. I repeat, it is impossible.

[*Enter Dame Pluche.*]

There you are, good Dame Pluche! My niece is with you, no doubt?

Pluche. She is following me, my lord. I preceded her by a few steps.

Baron. Master Bridaine, you are my friend. I present you to Dame Pluche, my niece's governess. My niece, yesterday at seven o'clock p. m., attained the age of eighteen years. She is leaving the best convent in France. Dame Pluche, I present to you Master Bridaine, priest of the parish, and my friend.

Pluche. [*Bowing.*] The best convent in France, my lord; and, I may add, the best Christian in the convent.

Baron. Go, Dame Pluche, and repair the disorder you are in. My niece will be here shortly, I hope. Be ready at the dinner hour.

[*Exit Dame Pluche.*]

Brid. That old lady seems full of unction.

Baron. Full of unction and compunction, Master Bridaine. Her virtue is unassailable.

Brid. But the tutor smells of wine. I am absolutely certain of it.

Baron. Master Bridaine, there are moments when I doubt your friendship. Do you presume to contradict me? Not a word more on that matter. I have formed the project of marrying

my son to my niece. They are made for one another. Their education has cost me six thousand crowns.

Brid. It will be necessary to obtain a dispensation.

Baron. I have it, Bridaine; it is in my study on my table. Oh, my friend, let me tell you now that I am full of joy. You know I have always detested solitude. Never-the-less, the position I occupy and the seriousness of my character compel me to reside in this chateau for three months every summer and winter. It is impossible to insure the happiness of men in general, and one's vassals in particular, without sometimes giving one's valet the stern order to admit no one. How austere and irksome is the statesman's retirement! And what pleasure may I not hope to find in mitigating, by the presence of my wedded children, the melancholy gloom to which I have been inevitably a prey since the king saw fit to appoint me a collector!

Brid. Will the marriage be performed here or at Paris?

Baron. That is just what I expected, Bridaine. I was certain you would ask that. Well, then, my friend—what would you say if those very hands—yes, Bridaine, your own hands—don't look at them so deprecatingly—were destined solemnly to bless the happy realization of my dearest dreams, eh?

Brid. I am silent; gratitude seals my lips.

Baron. Look out of this window; don't you see my servants crowding to the gate. My two children are arriving at the same moment; it is the happiest combination. I have arranged

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things in such a way that all is foreseen; my niece will be introduced by this door on the left, my son by the door on the right. What do you say to that? It will be the greatest delight to me to see how they will address one another, and what they will say. Six thousand crowns is no trifle, there is no mistake about that. Besides, the children loved each other tenderly from the cradle. Bridaine, I have an idea—

Brid. What?

Baron. During dinner, without seeming to mean anything by it—you understand, my friend—while emptying some merry glass—you know Latin, Bridaine?

Brid. *Ita ædepol*, by Jove, I should think so.

Baron. I should be very much pleased to see you put the lad through his paces—discreetly, of course—before his cousin; that can't fail to have a good effect. Make him speak a little Latin; not precisely during dinner, that would spoil our appetites; and as for me, I don't understand a word of it; but at dessert, do you see?

Brid. If you don't understand a word of it, my lord, probably your niece is in the same plight.

Baron. All the more reason. Would you have a woman admire what she understands? Where were you brought up, Bridaine? That is a lamentable piece of reasoning.

Brid. I don't know much about women; but it seems to me difficult to admire what one does not understand.

Baron. Ah, Bridaine, I know them; I know the charming, indefinable creatures! Be con-

vinced that they love to have dust in their eyes, ?
and the faster one throws, the wider they strain
them to catch more.

[*Enter on one side Perdican, Camille on the other.*]

Good day, children; good day, my dear Camille,
and you, my dear Perdican; kiss me and kiss each
other.

Perd. Good day, father, and you, my darling
sister. How delightful! How happy I am!

Cam. How do you do, father? And you,
cousin?

Perd. How tall you are, Camille, and beautiful
as the day!

Baron. When did you leave Paris, Perdican?

Perd. Wednesday, I think—or Tuesday.
Why, you are transformed into a woman! So I
am a man, am I? It seems only yesterday I saw
you only so high.

Baron. You must both be tired; it is a long
journey, and the day is hot.

Perd. Oh dear, no! Look how pretty Camille
is, father.

Baron. Come, Camille, give your cousin a
kiss.

Cam. Pardon me.

Baron. A compliment is worth a kiss. Give
her a kiss, Perdican.

Perd. If my cousin draws back when I hold
out my hand, I will say to you in my turn:
Pardon me. Love may steal a kiss, friendship
never.

Cam. Neither friendship nor love should accept
anything but what they can give back.

Baron. [*To Master Bridaine*]. This is an ill-omened beginning, eh?

Brid. [*To the Baron*]. Too much modesty is a fault, no doubt; but marriage does away with a deal of scruples.

Baron. [*To Master Bridaine*]. I am shocked—I am hurt. That answer displeased me. Pardon me! Did you see that she made a show of crossing herself? Come here and let me speak to you. It pains me to the last degree. This moment that was to be so sweet is wholly spoiled for me. I am vexed, annoyed. The devil take it; it is a regular bad business.

Brid. Say a few words to them; look at them turning their backs on each other.

Baron. Well, children, what in the world are you thinking of? What are you doing there, Camille, in front of that tapestry?

Cam. [*Looking at a picture*]. That is a fine portrait, uncle. Is it not a great-aunt of ours?

Baron. Yes, my child, it is your great-grandmother—or, at least, your great-grandfather's sister; for the dear lady never contributed—except, I believe, in prayers—to the augmentation of the family. She was a pious woman, upon my honor.

Cam. Oh, yes, a saint. She is my great-aunt Isabel. How that nun's dress becomes her!

Baron. And you, Perdican, what are you about before that flower-pot?

Perd. That's a charming flower, father. It is a heliotrope.

Baron. Are you joking? It is no bigger than a fly.

Perd. That little flower no bigger than a fly is worth having all the same.

Brid. No doubt the doctor is right. Ask him what sex or what class it belongs to, of what elements it consists, whence it gets its sap and its color; he will throw you into ecstasies with a description of the phenomena of yonder sprig, from its root to its flower.

Perd. I don't know so much about it, your reverence. I think it smells good, that is all

SCENE III—*Before the Chateau.*

Enter the Chorus.

Chorus. Several things amuse me and excite my curiosity. Come, friends, sit down under this walnut tree. Two formidable eaters are this moment present at the chateau—Master Bridaine and Master Blazius. Have you not noticed this—that when two men, closely alike, equally fat, equally sottish, with the same vices and the same passions, come to a meeting by some chance, it follows of necessity that they shall either adore or abominate each other? For the same reason that opposites attract, that a tall, lean man will like a short, round one, that fair people court the dark, and *vice versa*; I foresee a secret struggle between the tutor and the priest. Both are armed with equal impudence; each has a barrel for a belly; they are not only gluttons, but epicures; both will quarrel at table for quality as well as quantity. If the fish is small, what is to be done? And in any case a carp's tongue can

not be divided, and a carp can not have two tongues. Then both are chatterers; but if the worst comes to the worst, they can talk at once and neither listen to the other. Already Master Bridaine has wanted to put several pedantic questions to young Perdican, and the tutor scowled. It is distasteful to him that his pupil should appear to be examined by any one but himself. Again, one is as ignorant as the other. Again, they are priests, the pair of them; one will parade his benefice, the other will plume himself on the tutorship. Master Blazius is the son's confessor, Master Bridaine the father's. I see them already, elbows on the table, cheeks inflamed, eyes starting out of their heads, shaking their double chins in a paroxysm of hatred. They eye each other from head to foot; they begin the battle with petty skirmishes; soon war is declared; shots are exchanged; volleys of pedantry cross in mid-air; and, to cap all, between them frets Dame Pluche, repulsing them on either side with her sharp-pointed elbows. Now that dinner is over, the chateau gate is opened. The company are coming out; let us step aside out of the way.

[*Exeunt. Enter the Baron and Dame Pluche.*]

Baron. Venerable Pluche, I am pained.

Pluche. Is it possible, my lord?

Baron. Yes, Pluche, possible. I had calculated for a long time past—I had even set it down in black and white on my tablets—that this day was to be the most enjoyable of my life. Yes my good madam, the most enjoyable. You are not unaware that my plan was to marry my

son to my niece. It was decided, arranged—I had mentioned it to Bridaine—and I see, I fancy I see, that these children speak to each other with coolness; they have not said a word to each other.

Pluche. There they come, my lord. Are they advised of your projects?

Baron. I dropped a few hints to each of them in private. I think it would be well, since they are thrown together now, that we should sit down under this propitious shade and leave them to themselves for a moment.

[He withdraws with Dame Pluche. Enter Camille and Perdican.]

Perd. Do you know, Camille, it was not a bit nice of you to refuse me a kiss?

Cam. I am always like that, it is my way.

Perd. Will you take my arm for a stroll in the village?

Cam. No, I'm tired.

Perd. Would it not please you to see the meadow again? Do you remember our boating excursions? Come, we will go down as far as the mill; I'll take the oars, and you the tiller.

Cam. I don't feel the least inclined for it.

Perd. You cut me to the heart. What! Not one remembrance, Camille? Not a heart throb for our childhood, for all those kind, sweet past days, so full of delightful folly? You won't come and see the path we used to follow to the farm?

Cam. No, not this evening.

Perd. Not this evening! But when? Our whole life lies there.

Cam. I am not young enough to amuse my-

self with my dolls, nor old enough to love the past.

Perd. What do you mean by that?

Cam. I mean that recollections of childhood are not to my taste.

Perd. They bore you?

Cam. Yes, they bore me.

Perd. Poor child! I am sincerely sorry for you.

[*Exit in opposite directions*].

Baron. [*Entering with Dame Pluche*]. You see and you hear, my excellent Pluche. I expected the softest harmony, and I feel as if I were attending a concert where the violin is playing, "My heart it sighs," while the flute plays, "Long live King Henry." Think of the frightful discord such a combination would produce! Yet that is what is going on in my heart.

Pluche. I must admit it is impossible for me to blame Camille, and to my mind nothing is in worse taste than boating excursions.

Baron. Are you serious?

Pluche. My lord, a young lady who respects herself does not risk herself on the water.

Baron. But remark, pray, Dame Pluche, that her cousin is to marry her, and that thenceforward——

Pluche. The proprieties forbid steering; and it is indelicate to leave *terra firma* alone with a young man.

Baron. But I repeat—I tell you——

Pluche. That is my opinion——

Baron. Are you mad? Really, you would make me say—— There are certain expressions that I do not choose—that are repugnant to me.

You make me want—— Really, if I did not control myself—— Pluche, you are a dolt—I don't know what to think of you.

[*Exit.*]

SCENE IV—*A village green.*

The Chorus. Perdican.

Perd. Good day, friends; do you know me?

Chorus. My lord, you are like a child we loved dearly.

Perd. Was it not you who took me on your back to cross the streams of your meadows, who danced me on your knees, who took me up behind you on your sturdy horses, who crowded closer sometimes around your tables to make room for me at the farm supper?

Chorus. We remember, my lord. You were certainly the naughtiest rogue and the finest boy on earth.

Perd. Why do you not kiss me then, instead of saluting me like a stranger?

Chorus. God bless you, child of our hearts! Each of us would like to take you in his arms; but we are old, my lord, and you are a man.

Perd. Yes, it is ten years since I saw you; and in a single day all beneath the sun changes. I have grown some feet toward heaven; you have bowed some inches toward the grave. Your heads have whitened, your steps grown slower; you can no longer lift from the ground your child of long ago— So it is my turn now to be your father—father of you who were fathers to me.

Chorus. Your return is a happier day than your birth. It is sweeter to recover what we love than to embrace a new-born babe.

Perd. So this is my dear valley, my walnut trees, my green paths, my little fountain. Here are my past days still full of life; here is the mysterious world of my childhood's dreams. Home, ah home!—incomprehensible word. Can man be born just for a single corner of the earth, there to build his nest, and there to live his day?

Chorus. We hear you are a learned man, my lord.

Perd. Yes, I hear that, too. Knowledge is a fine thing, lads. These trees and this meadow find a voice to teach the finest knowledge of all—how to forget what one knows.

Chorus. There has been many a change during your absence. Girls are married, boys are gone to the army.

Perd. You shall tell me all about it. I expect a deal of news; but to tell the truth, I don't care to hear it yet. How small this pool is! Formerly it seemed immense. I had carried away an ocean and forests in my mind; I come back to find a drop of water and blades of grass. But who can that girl be, singing at her lattice behind those trees?

Chorus. It is Rosette, your cousin Camille's foster-sister.

Perd. [*Stepping forward*]. Come down quick, Rosette, and come here.

Rosette. [*Entering*]. Yes, my lord.

Perd. You saw me from your window, and you did not come, you wicked girl! Give me that

hand of yours, quick now, and those cheeks to be kissed.

Ros. Yes, my lord.

Perd. Are you married, little one? They told me so.

Ros. Oh, no!

Perd. Why? There isn't a prettier girl than you in all the village. We'll find you a match, child.

Chorus. My lord, she wants to die a maid.

Perd. Is that true, Rosette?

Ros. Oh, no!

Perd. Your sister Camille is come. Have you seen her?

Ros. She has not come this way yet.

Perd. Be off quick, and put on your new dress, and come to supper at the chateau.

SCENE V—*A large room.*

Enter the Baron and Master Blazius.

Blaz. A word in your ear, my lord. The priest of your parish is a drunkard.

Baron. Shame! It is impossible.

Blaz. I am certain of it. He drank three bottles of wine at dinner.

Baron. That is excessive.

Blaz. And on leaving the table he trampled on the flower beds.

Baron. On the beds! You confound me. This is very strange. Drink three bottles of wine at dinner and trample on the flower beds. Incomprehensible! And why did he not keep to the path?

Blaz. Because he walked crooked.

Baron. [*Aside*]. I begin to think Bridaine was right. This fellow Blazius smells shockingly of wine.

Blaz. Beside, he ate enormously; his utterance was thick.

Baron. Indeed, I remarked that myself.

Blaz. He delivered himself of a few Latin phrases; they were so many blunders. My lord, he is a depraved character.

Baron. [*Aside*]. Ugh! The odor of this fellow, Blazius, is past bearing. Understand, Mr. Tutor, that I am engaged in something very different from this, and that I don't concern myself with what is eaten or what is drunk here. I am not a major-domo.

Blaz. Please God, I will never displease you, my lord. Your wine is good.

Baron. There is good wine in my cellars.

[*Enter Master Bridaine*].

Brid. My lord, your son is out there on the green, with all the ragamuffins of the village at his heels.

Baron. It is impossible.

Brid. I saw it with my own eyes. He was picking up pebbles to make ducks and drakes.

Baron. Ducks and drakes! My brain begins to reel. Here are all my ideas turning upside down. Bridaine, the report you bring me is absurd. It is unheard of that a Doctor of Laws should make ducks and drakes.

Brid. Go to the window, my lord; you will see with your own eyes.

Baron. [*Aside*]. Good heavens! Blazius was right. Bridaine walks crooked.

Brid. Look, my lord; there he is, beside the pond. He has his arm around a peasant girl.

Baron. A peasant girl! Does my son come here to debauch my vassals? His arm around a peasant! And all the brats in the village around! I fear I shall go insane.

Brid. That calls for retribution.

Baron. All is lost—irretrievably lost. I am lost. Bridaine staggers, Blazius reeks of wine, and my son seduces all the girls in the village, while playing ducks and drakes.

[*Exit.*]

ACT THE SECOND

SCENE I—*A Garden.*

Enter Master Blazius and Perdican.

Blaz. My lord, your father is in despair.

Perd. Why so?

Blaz. You are aware that he had formed a plan of uniting you to your cousin, Camille.

Perd. Well, I ask no better!

Blaz. Nevertheless, the baron thinks he perceives an incompatibility in your characters.

Perd. That is unlucky. I can't remodel mine.

Blaz. Will you allow this to make the match impossible?

Perd. I tell you once more, I ask no better

than to marry Camille. Go and find the baron and tell him so.

Blaz. My lord, I withdraw; here comes your cousin.

[*Exit. Enter Camille.*]

Perd. Up already, cousin? I stick to what I said yesterday; you are ever so pretty!

Cam. Let us be serious, Perdican. Your father wants to make a match between us. I don't know what you think of it, but I consider it right to forewarn you that I have made up my mind on the matter.

Perd. The worse for me if you dislike me.

Cam. No more than any one else; I don't intend to marry. There is nothing in that to wound your pride.

Perd. I don't deal in pride; I care for neither its joys nor its pains.

Cam. I came here to enter on possession of my mother's property; to-morrow I go back to my convent.

Perd. Well, you play fair. Shake hands and let us be good friends!

Cam. I don't like demonstrations.

Perd. [*Taking her hand*]. Give me your hand, Camille, I beg of you. What do you fear of me? You don't choose that we should be married. Very well! Is that a reason for hating one another? Are we not brother and sister? When your mother enjoined this marriage in her will, she wished that our friendship should be unending; that is all she wished. Why marry? There is your hand, there is mine, and to keep them united thus to our last sigh, do you think we need a priest? We need none but God.

Cam. I am very glad my refusal leaves you unconcerned.

Perd. I am not unconcerned, Camille. Your love would have given me life, but your friendship shall console me for the lack of it. Don't leave the chateau to-morrow. Yesterday you refused to stroll around the garden with me, because you saw in me a husband you would not accept. Stay here a few days; let me hope that our past life is not dead forever in your heart.

Cam. I am bound to leave.

Perd. Why?

Cam. That is my secret.

Perd. Do you love another?

Cam. No; but I will go.

Perd. Is it irrevocable?

Cam. Yes, irrevocable.

Perd. Well, adieu. I should have liked to sit with you under the chestnuts in the little wood, and chat like kind friends for an hour or two, but if you don't care for that, let us say no more. Good-bye, my child.

[*Exit. Enter Dame Pluche.*]

Cam. Is all ready, Dame Pluche? Shall we start to-morrow? Has my guardian finished his accounts?

Pluche. Yes, dear unspotted dove. The baron called me a dolt, yesterday, and I am delighted to go.

Cam. Stay; here is a line you will take to Lord Perdican before dinner, from me.

Pluche. O Lord of heaven! Is it possible? You writing a note to a man——

Cam. Am I not to be his wife? Surely I may write to my fiancé.

Pluche. Lord Perdican has just left this spot. What can you have to write? Your fiancé! Heaven have pity on us! Can it be true that you are forgetting Jesus?

Cam. Do what I tell you, and make all ready for my departure.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II

The dining-room. Servants laying the table.

Enter Master Bridaine.

Brid. Yes, it is a certainty, they will give him the place of honor again to-day. This chair on the baron's right, that I have filled so long, will be the tutor's prize. Wretch that I am! A mechanical ass, a brazen drunkard gets me banished to the lower end of the table. The butler will pour for him the first glass of malaga, and when the dishes reach me they will be half cold; all the tid-bits will be gobbled up; not a cabbage nor a carrot left around the partridges. Holy Catholic Church! To give him that place yesterday—well, that was intelligible. He had just arrived, and was sitting down at that table for the first time since many a long year. Heavens, how he guzzled! No, he will leave me nothing but bones and chickens' claws. I will not endure this affront. Farewell, venerable arm-chair, in which many and many a time I have thrown myself back, stuffed with juicy dishes! Farewell,

sealed bottles; farewell, matchless savor of venison done to a turn! Farewell, splendid board; noble dining-hall; I shall say grace here no longer. I return to my vicarage; they shall not see me confounded among the mob of guests; and like Cæsar, I will rather be first in the village than second in Rome.

SCENE III—*A field in front of a cottage.*

Enter Rosette and Perdican.

Perd. Since your mother is out, come for a bit of a walk.

Ros. Do you think all these kisses do me any good?

Perd. What harm do you see in them? I would kiss you before your mother. Are you not Camille's sister? Am I not your brother, just as I am hers?

Ros. Words are words, and kisses are kisses. I am no better than a fool, and I find it out, too, as soon as I have something to say. Fine ladies know what it means if you kiss their right hand or if you kiss the left. Their fathers kiss them on the forehead; their mothers on the cheeks; and their lovers on the lips. Now everybody kisses me on both cheeks, and that vexes me.

Perd. How pretty you are, child!

Ros. All the same, you must not be angry with me for that. How sad you seem this morning! So your marriage is broken off?

Perd. The peasants of your village remember they loved me; the dogs in the poultry yard and the trees in the wood remember it, too; but Ca-

mille does not remember. And your marriage, Rosette, when is it to be?

Ros. Don't let us talk about that, if you please. Talk of the weather, of the flowers here, of your horses, of my caps.

Perd. Of whatever you please, of whatever can cross your lips without robbing them of that heavenly smile.

[*He kisses her.*]

Ros. You respect my smile, but you don't spare my lips much, it seems to me. Why, do look; there is a drop of rain fallen on my hand, and yet the sky is clear.

Perd. Forgive me.

Ros. What have I done to make you weep?

[*Excunt.*]

SCENE IV—*The Chateau.*

[*Enter Master Blazius and the Baron.*]

Blaz. My lord, I have a strange thing to tell you. A few minutes ago I chanced to be in the pantry—I mean in the gallery; what should I be doing in the pantry? Well, I was in the gallery. I had happened to find a decanter—I mean a jug of water. How was I to find a decanter in the gallery? Well, I was just drinking a drop of wine—I mean a glass of water—to pass the time, and I was looking out of the window between two flower vases that seemed to me to be in a modern style, though they are copied from the Etruscan.

Baron. What an intolerable manner of talk-

ing you have adopted, Blazius! Your speeches are inexplicable.

Blaz. Listen to me, my lord; lend me a moment's attention. Well, I was looking out of the window. In heaven's name, don't grow impatient. It concerns the honor of the family.

Baron. The family! This is incomprehensible. The honor of the family, Blazius? Do you know there are thirty-seven males of us, and nearly as many females, in Paris and in the country?

Blaz. Allow me to continue. While I was drinking a drop of wine—I mean a glass of water—to hasten tardy digestion, would you believe I saw Dame Pluche passing under the window out of breath?

Baron. Why out of breath, Blazius? That is unwonted.

Blaz. And beside her, red with anger, your niece, Camille.

Baron. Who red with anger—my niece or Dame Pluche?

Blaz. Your niece, my lord.

Baron. My niece red with anger? It is unheard of! And how do you know it was with anger? She might have been red for a thousand reasons. No doubt she had been chasing butterflies in my flower garden.

Blaz. I can't be positive about that—that may be; but she was exclaiming with vigor, "Go! Find him. Do as you are bid! You are a fool! I will have it!" And she rapped with her fan the elbow of Dame Pluche, who gave a jump in the clover at each exclamation.

Baron. In the clover! And what did the governess reply to my niece's vagaries; for such conduct merits that description.

Blaz. The governess replied: "I will not go! I will not find him. He is making love to the villagers, to goose-girls. I am too old to begin to carry love letters. Thank God, I have kept my hands clean up till now." And while she spoke she was crumpling up in her fingers a scrap of paper folded in four:

Baron. I don't understand at all; my ideas are becoming totally confused. What reason could Dame Pluche have for crumpling a paper folded in four, while she gave jumps in the clover? I can not lend credence to such enormities.

Blaz. Don't you clearly understand, my lord, what that indicated?

Baron. No, upon my honor, my friend; no, I don't understand a word of it, good or bad. All this seems to be a piece of ill-regulated conduct, but equally devoid of motive and excuse.

Blaz. It means that your niece has a clandestine correspondence.

Baron. What are you saying? Do you know of whom you are speaking? Weigh your words, Abbé!

Blaz. I might weigh them in the heavenly scales that are to weigh my soul at the last judgment, without finding a single syllable of them that does not ring true! Your niece has a clandestine correspondence.

Baron. But reflect, my friend, that it is impossible.

Blaz. Why should she have entrusted a letter to her governess? Why should she have exclaimed, "Find him!" while the other sulked and petted?

Baron. And to whom was this letter addressed?

Blaz. That is exactly the question—the *hic jacet lepus*. To whom was this letter addressed? To a man who is making love to a goose girl. Now, a man who publicly courts a goose-girl may be evidently suspected of being himself born to herd geese. Nevertheless, it is impossible that your niece, with the education she has received, should be captivated by such a man. That is what I tell you, and that is why, saving your presence, I don't understand a word of it any more than you.

Baron. Good heavens! My niece declared to me this morning that she refused her cousin Perdican's hand. Can she be in love with a goose-herd? Step into my study. Since yesterday I have experienced such violent shocks that I can not collect my ideas.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE V—*A fountain in a wood.*

Enter Perdican, reading a note.

Perd. "Be at the little fountain at noon." What does that mean? Such coldness; so positive and cruel a refusal; such unfeeling pride; and, to crown all, a rendezvous. If it is to talk business, why choose such a spot? Is it a

piece of coquetry? This morning, as I walked with Rosette, I heard a stir in the brushwood. I thought it was a doe's tread. Is there some plot in this?

[*Enter Camille.*]

Cam. Good day, cousin. I thought, rightly or wrongly, that you left me sadly this morning. You took my hand in spite of me. I come to ask you to give me yours. I refused you a kiss—here it is for you.

[*Kissing him.*]

Now then, you said you would like to have a friendly chat with me. Sit down then and let us talk.

[*She sits down.*]

Perd. Was it a dream, or am I dreaming now?

Cam. You thought it odd to get a note from me, did you not? I am changeable; but you said one thing this morning that was very true: "Since we part, let us part good friends." You do not know the reason of my leaving, and I am come here to tell you. I am going to take the veil.

Perd. Is it possible? Is it you, Camille, that I see reflected in the fountain, sitting on the daisies, as in the old days?

Cam. Yes, Perdican, it is I. I am come to live over again one half hour of the past life. I seemed to you rude and haughty. That is easily understood; I have renounced the world. Yet, before I leave it, I should like to hear your opinion. Do you think I am right to turn nun?

Perd. Don't question me on the subject, for I shall never turn monk.

Cam. In the ten years almost that we have lived separated from each other you have begun the experience of life. I know the man you are; and a heart and brain like yours must have learned much in a little while. Tell me, have you had sweethearts?

Perd. Why so?

Cam. Answer me, I beg of you, without bashfulness and without affectation.

Perd. I have had.

Cam. Did you love them?

Perd. With all my heart.

Cam. Where are they now? Do you know?

Perd. These are odd questions, upon my word. What would you have me say? I am neither their husband nor their brother. They went where it pleased them.

Cam. There must needs have been one you preferred to all others. How long did you love the one you loved best?

Perd. You're a queer girl. Do you want to turn father confessor?

Cam. I ask of you as a favor to answer me sincerely. You are far from a libertine, and I believe that your heart is honest. You must have inspired love, for you are worthy of it; and you would not have abandoned yourself to a whim. Answer me, I beg.

Perd. On my honor, I don't remember.

Cam. Do you know a man who has loved only one woman?

Perd. There are such, certainly.

Cam. Is he one of your friends? Tell me his name.

Perd. I have no name to tell you; but I believe there are men capable of loving once, and once only.

Cam. How often can an honorable man love?

Perd. Do you want to make me repeat a litany, or are you repeating a catechism yourself?

Cam. I want to get information, and to learn whether I do right or wrong to take the veil. If I married you, would you not be bound to answer all my questions frankly, and lay your heart bare for me to see? I have a great regard for you, and I count you superior by nature and education to many other men. I am sorry you have forgotten the things I question you about. Perhaps if I knew you better I should grow bolder.

Perd. What are you driving at? Go on. I will answer.

Cam. Answer my first question, then. Am I right to stay in the convent?

Perd. No!

Cam. Then I would do better to marry you?

Perd. Yes.

Cam. If the priest of your parish breathed on a glass of water, and told you it was a glass of wine, would you drink it as such?

Perd. No!

Cam. If the priest of your parish breathed on you, and told me that you would love all your life, should I do right to believe him?

Perd. Yes and no.

Cam. What would you advise me to do the day I saw you loved me no longer?

Perd. To take a lover.

Cam. What shall I do next, the day my lover loves me no longer?

Perd. Take another.

Cam. How long will that go on?

Perd. Till your hairs are gray, and then mine will be white.

Cam. Do you know what the cloisters are, Perdican? Did you ever sit a whole day long on the bench of a nunnery?

Perd. Yes, I have.

Cam. I have for a friend a sister, thirty years old, who at fifteen had an income of five hundred thousand crowns. She is the most beautiful and the noblest creature that ever walked on earth. She was a peeress of the parliament, and had for her husband one of the most distinguished men in France. Not one of the faculties that ennoble humanity had been left uncultivated in her, and, like a sapling of some choice stock, all her buds had branched. Love and happiness will never set their crown of flowers on a fairer forehead. Her husband deceived her; she loved another man and she is dying of despair.

Perd. That is possible.

Cam. We share the same cell, and I have passed whole nights in talking of her sorrows. They have almost become mine; that is strange, is it not? I don't quite know how it comes to pass. When she spoke to me of her marriage, when she painted the intoxication of the first days, and then the tranquillity of the rest, and

how, at the last, the whole had taken wings and flown; how in the evening she sat down by the chimney corner, and he by the window, without a word said between them; how their love had languished, and how every effort to draw close again only ended in quarrels; how little by little a strange figure came and placed itself between them, and glided in amid their sufferings; it was still myself that I saw acting while she spoke. When she said, "There I was happy," my heart leaped; when she added, "There I wept," my tears flowed. But fancy a thing stranger still. I ended by creating an imaginary life for myself. It lasted four years. It is needless to tell by how many reflected lights, how many doublings on myself all this came about. What I wanted to tell you as a curiosity is that all Louise's tales, all the phantoms of my dreams, bore your likeness.

Perd. My likeness—mine?

Cam. Yes—and that is natural; you were the only man I had known. In all truth, I loved you, Perdican.

Perd. How old are you, Camille?

Cam. Eighteen.

Perd. Go on, go on; I am listening.

Cam. There are two hundred women in our convent. A small number of these women will never know life; all the rest are waiting for death. More than one of them left the convent as I leave it to-day, virgin and full of hopes. They returned after a little while old and blasted. Everyday some of them die in our dormitories, and every day fresh ones come to take the place of the dead on the hair mattresses. Strangers

who visit us admire the calm and order of the house; they look attentively at the whiteness of our veils; but they ask themselves why we lower them over our eyes. What do you think of these women, Perdican? Are they wrong or are they right?

Perd. I can not tell.

Cam. There were some of them who counselled me to remain unmarried. I am glad to be able to consult you. Do you believe these women would have done better to take a lover, and counsel me to do the same?

Perd. I can not tell.

Cam. You promised to answer me.

Perd. I am absolved, as a matter of course, from the promise. I do not believe it is you who are speaking.

Cam. That may be; there must be great absurdities in all my ideas. It may well be that I have learned by rote, that I am only an ill-taught parrot. In the gallery there is a little picture that represents a monk bending over a missal; through the gloomy bars of his cell shines a feeble ray of sunlight, and you catch sight of an Italian inn, in front of which dances a goatherd. Which of these two men has more of your esteem?

Perd. Neither one nor the other, and both. They are two men of flesh and blood; there is one that reads and one that dances; I see nothing else in it. You are right to turn nun.

Cam. A minute ago you told me no.

Perd. Did I say no? That is possible.

Cam. So you advise me to do it?

Perd. So you believe in nothing?

Cam. Lift your head, Perdican. Who is the man that believes in nothing?

Perd. [*Rising*]. Here is one; I do not believe in immortal life. My darling sister, the nuns have given you their experience, but believe me it is not yours; you will not die without loving.

Cam. I want to love, but I do not want to suffer. I want to love with an undying love, and to swear vows that will not be broken. Here is my lover.

[*Showing her crucifix.*]

Perd. That lover does not exclude others.

Cam. For me, at least, he shall exclude them. Do not smile, Perdican. It is ten years since I saw you, and I go to-morrow. In ten years more, if we meet again, we will again speak of this. I did not wish your memory to picture me as a cold statue; for lack of feeling leads to the point I have reached. Listen to me. Return to life; and so long as you are happy, so long as you love as men can love on earth, forget your sister Camille; but if ever it chances to you to be forgotten, or yourself to forget, if the angel of hope abandons you when you are alone, with emptiness in your heart, think of me, who shall be praying for you.

Perd. You are a proud creature; take care of yourself.

Cam. Why?

Perd. You are eighteen, and you do not believe in love.

Cam. Do you believe in it, you who speak to me? There you are, bending beside me knees that have worn themselves on the carpets of

your sweetheart, whose very names you forget. You have wept tears of joy and tears of despair; but you knew that spring water was more constant than your tears and would be always there to wash your swollen eyelids. You follow your vocation of young man, and you smile when one speaks to you of women's lives blasted; you do not believe that love can kill, since you have loved and live. What is the world then? It seems to me that you must cordially despise the women who take you as you are, and who dismiss their last lover to draw you to their arms with another's kisses on their lips. A moment ago I was asking you if you had loved. You answered me like a traveler whom one might ask had he been in Italy or in Germany, and who should say, "Yes, I have been there," then would think of Switzerland or the first country you may name. Is your love a coin then, that it can pass like this from hand to hand till the day of death? No, not even a coin; for the tiniest gold piece is better than you, and whatever hand it may pass to, it still keeps its stamp.

Perd. How beautiful you are, Camille, when your eyes grow bright!

Cam. Yes, I am beautiful; I know it. Flatterers will teach me nothing new. The chill nun who cuts my hair off will perhaps turn pale at her work of mutilation; but it shall not change into rings and chains to go the round of the boudoirs. Not a strand of it shall be missing from my head when the steel passes there. I ask only one snap of the scissors, and when the consecrating priest draws on my finger the gold ring

of my heavenly spouse, the tress of hair I give him may serve him for a cloak.

Perd. Upon my word, you are angry.

Cam. I did wrong to speak; my whole life is on my lips. Oh, Perdican, do not scoff; it is all deathly sad.

Perd. Poor child, I let you speak, and I have a good mind to answer you one word. You speak to me of a nun who appears to me to have a disastrous influence upon you. You say that she has been deceived, that she herself has been false, and that she is in despair. Are you sure that if her husband or her lover came back, and stretched his hand to her through the grating of the convent parlor, she would not give him hers?

Cam. What do you say? I did not understand.

Perd. Are you sure that if her husband or her lover came, and bade her suffer again, she would answer, No?

Cam. I believe it.

Perd. There are two hundred women in your convent, and most of them have in the recesses of their hearts deep wounds. They have made you touch them, and they have dyed your maiden thoughts with drops of their blood. They have lived, have they not? And they have shown you shudderingly their life's road. You have crossed yourself before their scars as you would before the wounds of Jesus. They have made a place for you in their doleful processions, and you press closer to those fleshless bodies with a religious dread when you see a man pass. Are you sure that if the man passing were he who

deceived them, he for whom they weep and suffer, he whom they curse as they pray to God—are you sure that at sight of him they would not burst their fetters to fly to their past misfortunes, and to press their bleeding breasts against the poniard that scarred them? Oh, child! Do you know the dreams of these women who tell you not to dream? Do you know what name they murmur when the sighs issuing from their lips shake the sacramental host as it is offered to them? These women who sit down by you with swaying heads to pour into your ear the poison of their tarnished age, who clang among the ruins of your youth the tocsin of their despair, and strike into your crimson blood the chill of their tombs, do you know who they are?

Cam. You frighten me. Anger is getting the better of you, too.

Perd. Do you know what nuns are, unhappy girl? Do they, who represent to you men's love as a lie, know that there is a worse thing still—the lie of a divine love? Do they know that they commit a crime when they come whispering to a maiden, woman's talk? Ah, how they have schooled you! How clearly I divined all this when you stopped before the portrait of our old aunt! You wanted to go without pressing my hand; you would not revisit this wood, nor this poor little fountain that looks at us bathed in tears; you were a renegade to the days of your childhood, and the mask of plaster the nuns have placed on your cheeks refused me a brother's kiss. But your heart beat; it has forgot its lesson, for it has not learned to read, and you returned to sit on this turf where now we are.

Well, Camille, these women said well. They put you in the right path. It may cost me my life's happiness, but tell them from me—heaven is not for them.

Cam. Nor for me, is it?

Perd. Farewell, Camille. Return to your convent; and when they tell you one of their hideous stories that have poisoned your nature, give them the answer: All men are liars, fickle, chatterers, hypocrites, proud or cowardly, despicable, sensual; all women faithless, deceitful, vain, inquisitive and depraved. The world is only a bottomless cesspool, where shapeless monsters climb and writhe on mountains of slime. But there is in the world a thing holy and sublime—the union of two of these beings, imperfect and frightful as they are. One is often deceived in love, often wounded, often unhappy; but one loves, and on the brink of the grave one turns to look back, and says: I have suffered often, sometimes I have been mistaken, but I have loved. It is I who have lived, and not an imitation created by my pride and my sorrow.

[*Exit.*]

ACT THE THIRD

SCENE I—*The front of the Chateau.*

Enter the Baron and Master Blazius.

Baron. Independently of your drunkenness, you are a worthless fellow, Master Blazius. My

servants have seen you enter the pantry furtively; and when you are accused of having stolen my wine, in the most pitiable manner you think to justify yourself by accusing my niece of a clandestine correspondence.

Blaz. But, my lord, pray remember——

Baron. Leave the house, abbé, and never appear before me again. It is unreasonable to act as you do, and my self-respect constrains me never to pardon you as long as I live.

[*Exit. Master Blazius follows. Enter Perdican.*]

Perd. I should like to know if I am in love. On the one hand, there is that manner of questioning me, a trifle cavalier for a girl of eighteen. On the other, the ideas that these nuns have stuffed into her head will not be set right without trouble. Beside, she is to go to-day. Confound it! I love her; there's not a doubt of it. After all, who knows? Perhaps she was repeating a lesson; and beside, it is clear she does not trouble her head about me. On the other hand again, her prettiness is all very well, but that does not alter the fact that she has much too decided a manner and too curt a tone. My only plan is to think no more of it. It is plain I don't love her. There is no doubt she is pretty; but why can I not put yesterday's talk out of my head? Upon my word, my wits were wandering all last night. Now where am I going? Ah, I am going to the village.

[*Exit.*]

SCENE II—*A road.*

Enter Master Bridaine.

Brid. What are they doing now? Alas! it is now twelve o'clock. They are at table. What are they eating? What are they not eating? I saw the cook cross the village with a huge turkey. The scullion carried the truffles, with a basket of grapes.

[*Enter Master Blazius.*]

Blaz. Oh, unforeseen disgrace! Here I am turned out of the chateau, and, by consequence, from the dinner table. I shall never drink the wine in the pantry again.

Brid. I shall never see the dishes smoke again. Never again before the blaze of that noble hearth shall I warm my capacious stomach.

Blaz. Why did a fatal curiosity prompt me to listen to the conversation between Dame Pluche and the niece? Why did I report all I saw to the baron?

Brid. Why did foolish pride remove me from that honorable board, where I was so kindly welcomed? What mattered to me the seat on the right or the seat on the left?

Blaz. Alas! I was tipsy, it must be admitted, when I committed this folly.

Brid. Alas! The wine had mounted to my head when I was guilty of this rashness.

Blaz. Yonder is the vicar, I think.

Brid. It is the tutor in person.

Blaz. Oh! oh! Vicar, what are you doing here?

Brid. I? I am going to dinner. Are you not coming?

Blaz. Alas, Master Bridaine, intercede for me; the baron has dismissed me. I falsely accused Mademoiselle Camille of having a clandestine correspondence; and yet, God is my witness that I saw, or thought I saw, Dame Pluche in the clover. I am ruined, vicar.

Brid. What do you tell me?

Blaz. Alas! alas! the truth. I am in utter disgrace for stealing a bottle.

Brid. What has this talk of stolen bottles to do, sir, with a clover patch and correspondence?

Blaz. I entreat you to plead my cause. I am honorable, my Lord Bridaine. O worshipful Lord Bridaine, I am yours to command.

Brid. O fortune? Is it a dream? Shall I then be seated on yon blessed chair?

Blaz. I shall be grateful to you would you hear my story and kindly plead for me, your worship, my dear vicar.

Brid. That is impossible, sir; it has struck twelve, and I am off to dinner. If the baron complains of you, that is your business. I don't intercede for a sot.

[*Aside*].

Quick, fly to the gate; swell, my stomach.

[*Exit running*.]

Blaz. [*Alone*]. Wretched Pluche! It is you shall pay for them all; yes, it is you are the cause of my ruin, shameless woman, vile go-

between, it is to you I owe my disgrace. Holy university of Paris! I am called a sot! I am undone if I don't get hold of a letter, and if I don't prove to the baron that his niece has a correspondence. I saw her writing at her desk this morning. Patience! Here comes news!

[*Pass Dame Pluche, carrying a letter.*]

Pluche, give me that letter.

Pluche. What is the meaning of this? It is a letter of my mistress' that I am going to post in the village.

Blaz. Give it to me, or you are a dead woman.

Pluche. I dead! Dead?

Blaz. Yes, dead, Pluche; give me that paper.

[*They fight. Enter Perdican.*]

Perd. What is this? What are you about, Blazius? Why are you molesting this woman?

Pluche. Give me back the letter. He took it from me, my lord. Justice!

Blaz. She is a go-between, my lord. That letter is a billet-doux.

Pluche. It is a letter of Camille's, my lord—your fiancée's.

Blaz. It is a billet-doux to a goose-herd.

Pluche. You lie, abbé, let me tell you that.

Perd. Give me that letter. I understand nothing about your quarrel; but, as Camille's fiancé, I claim the right to read it.

[*Reads.*]

"To Sister Louise, at the Convent of —."
Leave me, Dame Pluche; you are a worthy

woman, and Master Blazius is a fool. Go to dinner; I undertake to put this letter in the post.

[*Exeunt Master Blazius and Dame Pluche.*]

Perd. [*Alone.*] That it is a crime to open a letter I know too well to be guilty of it. What can Camille be saying to this sister? Am I in love after all? What empire has this strange girl gained over me that the line of writing on this address should make my hand shake? That's odd; Blazius, in his struggle with Dame Pluche, has burst the seal. Is it a crime to unfold it? No matter, I will put everything just as it was.

[*Opens the letter and reads.*]

"I am leaving to-day, my dear, and all has happened as I had foreseen. It is a terrible thing; but that poor young man has a dagger in his heart; he will never be consoled for having lost me. Yet I have done everything in the world to disgust him with me. God will pardon me for having reduced him to despair by my refusal. Alas! my dear, what could I do? Pray for me. We shall meet again to-morrow, and forever

"Yours with my whole soul—Camille."

Is it possible? That is how Camille writes! That is how she speaks of me! I in despair at her refusal? Oh, good heavens! If that were true, it would be easily seen; what shame could there be in loving? She does everything in the world, she says, to disgust me, and I have a dagger in my heart. What reason can she have to invent such a romance? Is it then true—the thought that I had to-night? Oh women! This poor Camille has great piety perhaps. With a willing heart she gives herself to God, but she has

resolved and decreed that she would leave me, in despair. That was settled between the two friends before she left the convent. It was decided that Camille was going to see her cousin again, that they would wish her to marry him, that she would refuse, and that the cousin would be in despair. It is so interesting for a young girl to sacrifice to God the happiness of a cousin! No, no, Camille, I do not love you, I am not in despair, I have not a dagger in my heart, and I will prove it to you. Before you leave this, you shall know that I love another. Here, my good man!

[*Enter a peasant.*]

Go to the chateau; tell them in the kitchen to send a servant to take this note to Mademoiselle Camille.

[*He writes.*]

Peasant. Yes, my lord.

[*He goes out.*]

Perd. Now for the other. Ah! I am in despair. Here! Rosette, Rosette!

[*He knocks at a door.*]

Ros. [*Opening it*]. Is it you, my lord? Come in, my mother is here.

Perd. Put on your prettiest cap, Rosette, and come with me.

Ros. Where?

Perd. I will tell you. Ask leave of your mother, but make haste.

Ros. Yes, my lord.

[*She goes into the house.*]

Perd. I have asked Camille for another ren-

dezvous, and I am sure she will come; but, by heaven, she will not find what she expects there. I mean to make love to Rosette before Camille herself.

SCENE III—*The little wood.*

Enter Camille and the Peasant.

Peas. I'm going to the chateau with a letter for you, miss. Must I give it to you, or must I leave it in the kitchen, as Lord Perdican told me?

Cam. Give it to me.

Peas. If you would rather I took it to the chateau, it isn't worth while waiting here.

Cam. Give it to me, I tell you.

Peas. As you please.

[*Gives the letter.*]

Cam. Stop, there's for your trouble.

Peas. Many thanks. Shall I go?

Cam. If you like.

Peas. I am going, I am going.

[*Exit.*]

Cam. [*Reading*]. Perdican asks me to say good-bye to him before leaving, near the little fountain where I met him yesterday. What can he have to say to me? Why, here is the fountain and I am on the spot. Ought I to grant this second rendezvous? Ah!

[*Hides behind a tree.*]

There is Perdican coming this way with my foster-sister. I suppose he will leave her. I am

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glad that I shan't seem to be the first to arrive.

[*Enter Perdican and Rosette, and sit down.*]

Cam. [*Hidden, aside*]. What is the meaning of this? He is making her sit down beside him. Does he ask me for a rendezvous to come there and talk with another girl? I am curious to know what he says to her.

Perd. [*Aloud, so that Camille hears*]. I love you, Rosette. You alone, out of all the world, have forgotten nothing of our good days that are past. You are the only one who remembers the life that is no more. Share my new life. Give me your heart, sweet child. There is the pledge of my love.

[*Putting his chain on her neck.*]

Ros. Are you giving me your gold chain?

Perd. Now look at this ring. Stand up and let us come near the fountain. Do you see us both in the spring, leaning on each other? Do you see your lovely eyes near mine, your hand in mine? Watch how all that is blotted out.

[*Throwing his ring into the water.*]

Look how our image has disappeared. There it is coming back little by little. The troubled water regains its tranquillity. It trembles still. Great black rings float over its surface. Patience! We are re-appearing. Already I can make out again your arms entwined in mine. One minute more and there will not be a wrinkle left in your pretty face. Look! It was a ring that Camille gave me.

Cam. [*Aside*]. He has thrown my ring into the water.

Perd. Do you know what love is, Rosette? Listen! The wind is hushed; the morning rain runs pearly over the parched leaves that the sun revives. By the light of heaven, by this sun we see, I love you! You are mine, are you not? No one has tarnished your youth! No one has distilled into your crimson blood the dregs of jaded veins! You do not want to turn nun? There you stand, young and fair, in a young man's arms. O Rosette, Rosette, do you know what love is?

Ros. Alas, Doctor, I will love you as best I can.

Perd. Yes, as best you can; and that will be better, doctor though I am, and peasant though you are, than these pale statues can love, fashioned by nuns, their heads where their hearts should be, who leave the cloisters to come and spread through life the dank atmosphere of their cells. You know nothing; you could not read in a book the prayer that your mother taught you as she learned it from her mother. You do not even understand the sense of the words you repeat when you kneel at your bedside; but you understand that you are praying, and that is all God wants.

Ros. How you speak, my lord!

Perd. You can not read; but you can tell what these woods and meadows say, their warm rivers and fair harvest-covered fields, and all this nature radiant with youth. You recognize all these thousands of brothers, and me as one of them. Rise up; you shall be my wife, and together we shall strike root into the vital currents of the mighty world.

SCENE IV

Enter the Chorus.

Chorus. Certainly there is something strange going on at the chateau. Camille has refused to marry Perdican. She is to return to the convent. But I think his lordship, her cousin, has consoled himself with Rosette. Alas! the poor girl does not know the risk she runs in listening to the speeches of a gallant young nobleman.

[Enter Dame Pluche.]

Pluche. Quick! quick! saddle my ass.

Chorus. Will you pass away like a beautiful dream, venerable lady? Are you going to bestride again that poor beast who is so burdened with your weight?

Pluche. Thank God, my sweet rabble, I shall not die here!

Chorus. Die far from here, Pluche, my darling; die unknown in some unwholesome cavern. We will pray for your worshipful resurrection.

Pluche. Here comes my mistress.

[To Camille, who enters.]

Dear Camille, all is ready for our start; the baron has rendered his account, and they have pack-saddled my ass.

Cam. To the devil with you and your beast! I shall not start to-day.

[Exit.]

Chorus. What can this mean? Dame Pluche is pale with anger; her false hair tries to stand on end, her chest heaves, and her fingers clutch convulsively.

Pluche. Lord God of heaven! Camille swore!

[*Exit.*]

SCENE V

Enter the Baron and Master Bridaine.

Brid. My lord, I must speak to you in private. Your son is making love to a village girl.

Baron. It is absurd, my friend.

Brid. I distinctly saw him walking in the heather with her on his arm. He was bending his head to her ear and promising to marry her.

Baron. This is monstrous.

Brid. You may be convinced of it. He made her a considerable present that the girl showed her mother.

Brid. Heavens, Bridaine! Considerable? In what way considerable?

Brid. In weight and importance. It was the gold chain he used to wear in his cap.

Baron. Let us step into my study. I don't know what to think of it.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE VI—*Camille's room.*

Enter Camille and Dame Pluche.

Cam. He took my letter, you say?

Pluche. Yes, my child; he undertook to put it in the post.

Cam. Go to the drawing-room, Dame Pluche, and do me the kindness to tell Perdican that I expect him here.

[Exit Dame Pluche.]

He read my letter that is a certainty. His scene in the wood was a retaliation, like his love for Rosette. He wished to prove to me that he loved another girl, and to play at unconcern in spite of his vexation. Could he be in love with me by any chance?

[She lifts the tapestry.]

Are you there, Rosette?

Ros. *[Entering]*. Yes; may I come in?

Cam. Listen to me, my child. Is not Lord Perdican making love to you?

Ros. Alas! yes.

Cam. What do you think of what he said to you this morning?

Ros. This morning? Where?

Cam. Don't play the hypocrite. This morning at the fountain in the little wood.

Ros. You saw me there?

Cam. Poor innocent! No, I did not see you. He made you fine speeches, did he not? I would wager he promised to marry you.

Ros. How do you know that?

Cam. What matter how? I know it. Do you believe in his promises, Rosette?

Ros. Why, how could I help it? He deceive me? Why should he?

Cam. Perdican will not marry you, my child.

Ros. Alas! I can't tell.

Cam. You are in love with him, poor girl. He will not marry you; and for proof, you shall have it. Go in again behind this curtain. You need only keep your ears open, and come when I call you.

[*Exit Rosette.*]

Cam. [*Sol.*] Can it be that I who thought I was wreaking vengeance, am doing an act of humanity? The poor girl's heart is caught.

[*Enter Perdican.*]

Good morning, cousin; sit you down.

Perd. What a toilette, Camille! Whose scalp are you after?

Cam. Yours, perhaps. I am sorry I could not come to the rendezvous you asked for; had you anything to say to me?

Perd. [*Aside.*] A pretty story that, on my life, for a spotless lamb. I saw her listening to the conversation behind a tree.

[*Aloud.*]

I have nothing to say to you but farewell, Camille. I thought you were about to leave us; yet your horse is in the stable, and you do not look as if you were dressed for traveling.

Cam. I like discussion. I am not very sure that I do not want to quarrel with you again.

Perd. What is the use in quarrelling when it

is impossible to make it up? The pleasure of disputes is in making peace.

Cam. Are you convinced that I don't wish to make it?

Perd. Don't laugh at me; I am no match for you there.

Cam. I should like a flirtation. I don't know whether it is because I have a new dress on, or because I want to amuse myself. You proposed going to the village; let us go. I'm ready; let us take the boat. I want to picnic on the grass, or to take a stroll in the forest. Will it be moonlight this evening? That's odd; you are not wearing the ring I gave you.

Perd. I have lost it.

Cam. Then that is why I found it. There, Perdican; here it is for you.

Perd. Is it possible? Where did you find it?

Cam. You are looking to see if my hands are wet, are you not? Indeed, I spoiled my convent dress to get this little child's plaything out of the fountain. That is why I have put on another, and I tell you it has changed me. Come, put that on your finger.

Perd. You got this ring out of the water, Camille, at the risk of falling in yourself? Is this a dream? And you are putting it on my finger? Ah, Camille, why do you give it back to me, this sad pledge of a happiness that exists no longer? Speak, coquette; speak, rash girl. Why do you go? Why do you stay? Why do you change color from hour to hour, like the stone of this ring at every ray of the sun?

Cam. Do you know the heart of woman,

Perdican? Are you sure of their inconstancy? And do you know whether they really change in thought when they change in words? Some say no. Undoubtedly we often have to play a part, we often lie. You see I am frank. But are you sure that the whole woman lies when her tongue lies? Have you reflected well on the nature of this weak and passionate being, on the sternness with which she is judged, and on the rules that are imposed on her? And who knows whether, forced by the world into deceit, this little brainless creature's head may not take a pleasure in it, and lie sometimes for pastime or for folly, as she does for necessity?

Perd. I understand nothing of all this, and I never lie. I love you, Camille. That is all I know.

Cam. You say that you love me, and that you never lie——

Perd. Never.

Cam. Yet here is one who says that that sometimes happens to you.

[She raises the tapestry. Rosette is seen in the distance, fainting on a chair.]

What answer will you make to this child, Perdican, when she demands an account of your words? If you never lie, how comes it then that she fainted on hearing you tell me that you love me? I leave you with her. Try to restore her.

[She attempts to leave.]

Perd. One moment, Camille. Listen to me.

Cam. What would you tell me? It is to Rosette you should speak. I do not love you. I

did not go out of spite and fetch this unhappy child from the shelter of her cottage, to make a bait and a plaything of her. I did not rashly repeat before her burning words addressed to another woman. I did not feign to hurl to the winds for her sake the remembrance of a cherished friendship. I did not put my chain on her neck. I did not tell her I would marry her.

Perd. Listen to me, listen to me.

Cam. Did you not smile a moment ago when I told you I had not been able to go to the fountain? Well, yes, I was there, and I heard all. But God is my witness, I would not care to have spoken as you spoke there. What will you do with that girl yonder, now when she comes with your passionate kisses on her lips, and shows you, weeping, the wound you have dealt her? You wished to be revenged on me—did you not?—and to punish me for a letter written to my convent. You wished to loose, at whatever cost, any shaft that could reach me, and you counted it as nothing to pierce this child with your poisoned arrow, provided it struck me behind her. I had boasted of having inspired some love in you, of leaving in you some regret for me. So that wounded you in your noble pride! Well, learn it from my lips. You love me—do you hear?—But you will marry that girl, or you are nothing but a coward.

Perd. Yes, I will marry her.

Cam. And you will do well.

Perd. Right well, and far better than if I married you yourself. Why so hot, Camille?

This child has fainted. We shall easily restore her. A flask of vinegar is all that's needed. You wished to prove to me that I had lied once in my life. That is possible, but I think you are bold to determine at what moment. Come, help me to restore Rosette.

[*Excunt.*]

SCENE VII

The Baron and Camille.

Baron. If that takes place, I shall run mad.

Cam. Use your authority.

Baron. I shall refuse my consent, that's certain.

Cam. You ought to speak to him, and make him hear reason.

Baron. This will throw me into despair for the whole carnival, and I shall not appear once at court. It is a misalliance. Nobody ever heard of marrying one's cousin's foster-sister; that passes all kinds of bounds.

Cam. Send for him, and tell him flatly that you don't like the marriage. Believe me, it is a piece of madness, and he will not resist.

Baron. I shall be in black this winter, be assured of that.

Cam. But speak to him, in heaven's name. This is a freak of his; perhaps it is too late already; if he has committed himself, he will carry it out.

Baron. I am going to my room, that I may abandon myself to my sorrow. Tell him, if he

asks for me, that I have shut myself up, and that I am overcome with sorrow at seeing him wed a nameless girl.

[*Exit.*]

Cam. Shall I not find a sensible man here? Upon my word, when you look for one, the solitude becomes appalling.

[*Enter Perdican.*]

Well, cousin, and when is the wedding to be?

Perd. As soon as possible; I have mentioned it already to the notary, the priest and all the peasants.

Cam. You really think, then, that you will marry Rosette?

Perd. Assuredly.

Cam. What will your father say?

Perd. Whatever he pleases; I choose to marry this girl; it is an idea for which I am indebted to you, and I stand to it. Need I repeat to you the hackneyed commonplaces about my birth and hers? She is young and pretty, and she loves me; it is more than one needs to be trebly happy. Whether she have brains or no, I might have found worse. People will raise an outcry and a laugh; I wash my hands of them.

Cam. There is nothing laughable in it; you do very well to marry her. But I am sorry for you on one account; people will say you married her out of spite.

Perd. You sorry for that? Oh, no!

Cam. Yes, I am really sorry for it. It injures a young man to be unable to resist a moment's annoyance.

Perd. Be sorry then; for my part, it's all one to me.

Cam. But you don't mean it; she is nobody.

Perd. She will be somebody then, when she is my wife.

Cam. You will tire of her before the notary has put on his best coat and his shoes, to come here; your gorge will rise at the wedding breakfast, and the evening of the ceremony you will have her hands and feet cut off, as they do in the "Arabian Nights," because she smells of ragout.

Perd. No such thing, you will see. You do not know me. When a woman is gentle and affectionate, fresh, kind and beautiful, I am capable of contenting myself with that; yes, upon my word, even to the length of not caring to know if she speaks Latin.

Cam. It is a pity there was so much money spent on teaching it to you; it is three thousand crowns lost.

Perd. Yes; they would have done better to give it to the poor.

Cam. You will take charge of it, for the poor in spirit, at least.

Perd. And they will give me in exchange the kingdom of heaven, for it is theirs.

Cam. How long will this sport last?

Perd. What sport?

Cam. Your marriage with Rosette.

Perd. A very little while; God has not made man a lasting piece of work; thirty or forty years at the most.

Cam. I look forward to dancing at your wedding.

Perd. Listen to me, Camille, this tone of raillery is out of season.

Cam. I like it too well to leave it.

Perd. Then I leave you, for I have enough of you for the moment.

Cam. Are you going to your bride's home?

Perd. Yes, this instant.

Cam. Give me your arm; I am going there, too.

[*Enter Rosette.*]

Perd. Here you are, my child. Come, I want to present you to my father.

Ros. [*Kneeling down*]. My lord, I am come to ask a favor of you. All the village folk I spoke to this morning told me that you loved your cousin, and that you only made love to me to amuse both of you; I am laughed at as I pass, and I shall not be able to find a husband in the country, now that I have been the laughing-stock of the neighborhood. Allow me to give you the necklace you gave me, and to live in peace with my mother.

Cam. You are a good girl, Rosette; keep the necklace. It is I who give it to you, and my cousin will take mine in its place. As for a husband, don't trouble your head for that; I undertake to find one for you.

Perd. Certainly there is no difficulty about that. Come, Rosette, come and let me take you to my father.

Cam. Why? It is useless.

Perd. Yes, you are right; my father would receive us ill; we must let the first moment

of his surprise pass by. Come with me; we will go back to the green. A good joke, indeed, that it should be said I don't love you, when I am marrying you. By Jove, we will silence them.

[Exit with Rosette.]

Cam. What can be happening in me? He takes her away with a very tranquil air. That is odd; my head seems to be swimming. Could he marry her in good earnest? Ho! Dame Pluche, Dame Pluche! Is no one here?

[Enter a footman.]

Run after Lord Perdican; make haste, and tell him to come up here again; I want to speak to him.

[Exit footman.]

What in the world is all this? I can bear no more; my limbs refuse to support me.

[Re-enter Perdican.]

Perd. You asked for me, Camille.

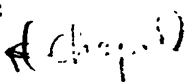
Cam. No—no——

Perd. Truly you are pale; what have you to say to me? You recalled me to speak to me.

Cam. No—no—— O heavens!

[Exit.]

LAST SCENE

An Oratory. 

Enter Camille. She throws herself at the foot of the altar.

Cam. Have you abandoned me, O my God?

You know when I came here I had promised to be faithful to you. When I refused to become the bride of another than you, I thought I spoke in singleness of heart, before you and before my conscience. You know it, O my Father! Do not reject me now. Ah, why is truth itself a liar? Why am I so weak? Ah, unhappy girl that I am; I can pray no more!

[*Enter Perdican.*]

Perd. Pride, most fatal of men's counsellors, why didst thou come between this girl and me? Yonder is she, pale and affrighted, pressing on the unfeeling stone her heart and her face. She might have loved me. We were born for one another. Wherefore didst thou touch our lips, O Pride, when our hands were about to join——?

Cam. Who follows me here? Who speaks? Is it you, Perdican?

Perd. Blind fools that we are; we love each other. What were we dreaming, Camille? What vain words, what wretched follies passed between us like a pestilent wind? Which wished to deceive the other? (Alas, this life is in itself so sad a dream; why should we confound it further with fancies of our own? Oh, my God, happiness is a pearl so rare in this ocean of a world. Thou, Heavenly Fisherman, didst give it to us; Thou rescue it for us from the depths of the abyss, this priceless jewel; and we, like spoiled children that we are, made a plaything of it. The green path that led us toward each other sloped so gently, such flowery shrubs surrounded it, it merged in so calm a horizon—and vanity, folly and anger have cast their shapeless rocks

on this celestial path, which would have brought us to thee in a kiss. We must do wrong, for we are of mankind. O blind fools! We love each other——!

Cam. Yes, we love each other, Perdican. Let me feel it on your heart. The God who looks down on us will not be offended. It is by His will that I love you. He has known it these fifteen years.

Perd. Dear one, you are mine.

[He kisses her. A great cry is heard from behind the altar.]

Cam. It is my foster-sister's voice.

Perd. How does she come here? I had left her on the staircase when you sent to bring me back. She must have followed me unperceived.

Cam. Come out into the gallery; the cry was from there.

Perd. What is this I feel? I think my hands are covered with blood.

Cam. The poor child must have spied on us. She has fainted again. Come, let us bring her help. Alas! it is all cruel——

Perd. No, truly, I will not go in. I feel a deadly chill that paralyzes me. Go you, Camille, and try to restore her.

[Exit Camille.]

I beseech of you, my God, do not make me a murderer. You see what is happening. We are two senseless children. We played with life and death, but our hearts are pure. Do not kill Rosette, O righteous God! I will find her a husband; I will repair my fault. She is young;

she will be happy. Do not do that, O God!
You may yet bless four of your children.

[Enter Camille.]

Well, Camille, what is it?

Cam. She is dead. Farewell, Perdican!

A DOOR MUST BE EITHER OPEN OR SHUT

PROVERB IN ONE ACT

(PUBLISHED IN 1845; ACTED IN 1848)

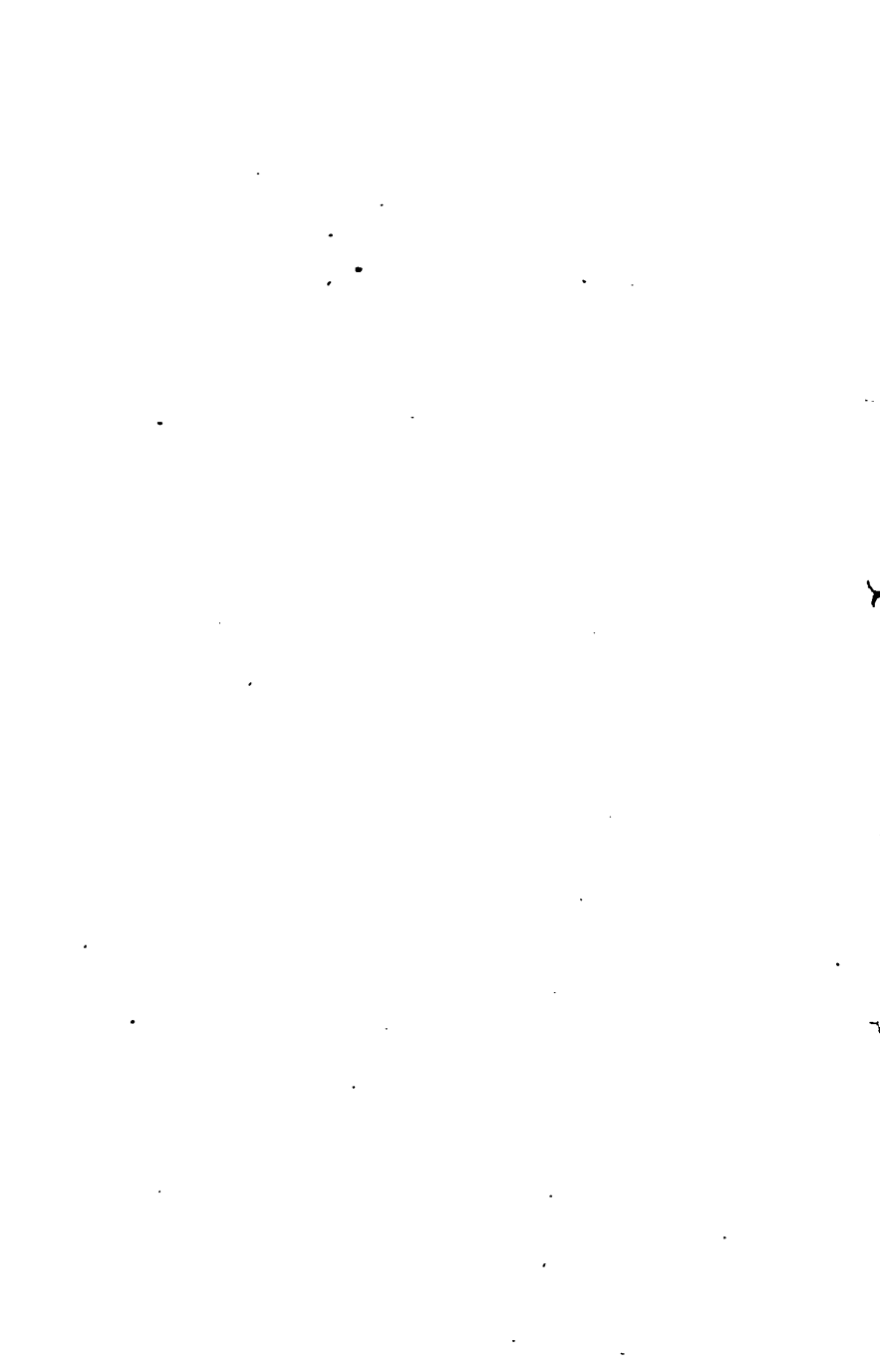
DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

THE COUNT.

|

THE MARQUISE.

Scene—Paris.



A DOOR MUST BE EITHER OPEN
OR SHUT

A PROVERB IN ONE ACT

SCENE—*Paris.*

The Marquisé is seated on a sofa near the fire embroidering. Enter the Count; he bows.

Count. I don't know when I shall get over my stupidity, but my memory is shocking. I can't possibly take upon me to remember your day; and whenever I want to see you, it is sure to be a Tuesday.

Mar. Have you anything to say to me?

Count. No; but suppose I had, I could not say it. It is only a chance that you are by yourself, and within the next quarter of an hour you are sure to have a mob of intimate friends in here; they will put me to flight, I warn you.

Mar. It is true that to-day is my day, and I don't quite know why I have one. It's a fashion; but there is a reason for it all the same. Our mothers left their doors open; good society was not numerous, and only meant for each circle a batch of bores, accepted as a matter of duty. Nowadays, when you are at home, you are at home to all Paris; and all Paris nowadays is in real earnest the whole of Paris, town and suburbs. When one is at home, one's house is a street. A remedy had to be found, and, accordingly, everybody has a day. It is the only way to see as little as possible of each other, and when you say, "I am at home on Tuesdays," it is clearly just as if you said, "Leave me in peace on the other days——"

Count. That makes it all the worse for me to come to-day, since you allow me to see you in the week——

Mar. Sit down. If you are in a good temper, you may talk; if not, warm yourself. I don't expect a great many people to-day, and you shall watch the slides change in my little magic lantern. But what's the matter with you? You seem——

Count. What?

Mar. I would not say the word for the world.

Count. Well, indeed, then I will admit it. Before I came in I was a little——

Mar. What? It is my turn now to ask.

Count. Will you be angry if I tell you?

Mar. There is a ball this evening, where I want to look my best, so I shall not lose my temper all day.

Count. Well, I was a little bored. I don't know what's the matter with me; it's a fashionable affliction, like your days. I've been wretched since twelve o'clock; paid four visits, and found no one in. I was to dine somewhere; excused myself without any reason. There is nothing to go to this evening. I went out in a bitter frost, saw nothing but red noses and blue cheeks. I don't know what to do. I am as stupid as a magazine article.

Mar. I can say the same for myself. I am bored to extinction. It is the weather, no doubt.

Count. The fact is, cold is abominable. Winter is an ailment. Fools see the pavement clean and the sky clear, and when a good, sharp wind nips their ears, they call that a fine frost. It is like talking of a fine inflammation of the lungs. Many thanks for fineries of that sort.

Mar. I go further than you. It seems to me that I get my dullness not so much from the air out of doors, cold though it is, as from the air other people breathe. Perhaps it is because we are growing old. I am beginning to be thirty, and I am losing my talent for existence.

Count. It is a talent I never had, and what frightens me is that I am picking it up. As one ages, one turns foggy or fool, and I am desperately afraid of dying a wiseacre.

Mar. Ring for them to put a log on the fire. Your idea freezes me.

[*A ring heard outside.*]

Count. It is not worth while. There is a

ring at the door, and your procession is arriving.

Mar. Let us see who will carry the flag; and, above all, do your best to stay.

Count. No; decidedly I am off.

Mar. Where are you going?

Count. I haven't an idea.

[*He rises, bows and opens the door.*]

Adieu, madame, till Thursday evening.

Mar. Why Thursday?

Count. Is it not your day at the opera? I will go and pay you a little visit.

Mar. I don't want you; you are too cross. Besides, I am taking M. Camus.

Count. M. Camus, your country neighbor?

Mar. Yes. He sold me apples and hay with great gallantry, and I want to return his civility.

Count. Now, that is just your way. The most wearisome creature! He should be fed on his own wares. And, by the way, do you know what the world says?

Mar. No. But no one is coming. Who rang there?

Count. [*Looking out of window*]. No one. A little girl, I think, with a bandbox—something or other—a washerwoman. She is there in the court, talking to your servants.

Mar. You call that something or other! That's polite of you. It is my bonnet. Well, what are they saying about me and M. Camus? Do shut that door. There's a terrible draught.

Count. People are saying that you are thinking of marrying again, and that M. Camus is a

millionaire, and that he comes very often to your house.

Mar. Really! Is that all? And you tell me that to my face?

Count. I tell it you because people are talking of it.

Mar. That is a pretty reason. Do I repeat to you all the world says of you?

Count. Of me, madame? What do they say, if you please, that will not bear repeating?

Mar. But you see, anything will bear repeating, since you tell me that I am on the eve of being announced as Madame Camus. The story about you is at least as serious, for, unfortunately, it appears that it is true.

Count. What can it be? You frighten me.

Mar. One more proof that the world is right.

Count. Explain yourself, I beg.

Mar. Oh, on no account. It is your own affair—

Count. [*Sitting down again*]. I implore you, Marquisé. I ask it as a favor. You are the person in all the world whose opinion I value most.

Mar. One of the persons, you mean.

Count. No, madame, I say the person—she whose esteem, whose opinion—

Mar. Good heavens! you are going to turn a phrase.

Count. Not at all. If you see nothing, evidently it is because you will not see.

Mar. See what?

Count. You can't but understand—

Mar. I only understand what people tell me, and even then I am hard of hearing.

Count. You laugh at everything; but, candidly, could it be possible that after seeing you for a whole year, with your wit, your beauty, your grace——

Mar. But, good heavens! This is worse than a phrase; it is a declaration. Warn me at least. Is it a declaration or a New Year's compliment?

Count. And suppose it were a declaration?

Mar. Oh, I don't want it this morning. I told you I was going to a ball; I run the risk of hearing some this evening, and my health won't stand that sort of thing twice a day.

Count. Truly you are discouraging, and I shall be heartily delighted when your turn comes to be caught.

Mar. I shall be delighted myself. I swear to you, there are instants when I would give large sums to have even a little vexation. Why, that's how I felt while my hair was being done, only just a few minutes ago. I was sighing as if my heart would break, from despair at having nothing to think of——

Count. Laugh away, laugh away; your turn will come.

Mar. Very possibly; we are all mortal. I assure you I don't try to prevent it.

Count. So you don't choose to be made love to?

Mar. No. I am very good-natured; but as for love-making, it is quite too stupid. Come now, you who have common sense, tell me what does this mean: Making love to a woman?

Count. It means that the woman in question pleases you, and that you like to tell her so.

Mar. Very well; but what about the woman? Does it please her to please you? For instance, you think me pretty, let us suppose, and it amuses you to let me know this. Well, what next? What does that prove? Is it a reason for me to love you? I imagine that if anyone pleases me, that is not because I am pretty. What does he gain by these compliments? A pretty way, truly, to make a woman fall in love with you—to come and plant yourself in front of her with an eyeglass, look her over from head to foot, as if she were a doll in a shop window, and say to her very condescendingly: “Madame, I think you charming.” Add to that a few stale phrases, a waltz and a bouquet, and that is what they call making love to a woman. For shame! How can a man of brains take any pleasure in such follies? It puts me into a passion when I think of it.

Count. Still, there is nothing to get angry about.

Mar. On my word, there is. You must credit a woman with a very empty head and a great stock of stupidity to imagine that you can mix a charm for her out of such ingredients. Do you believe it is very diverting to pass one’s life in the midst of a deluge of insipidities, and to have one’s ears full of nonsense from morning to evening? Really, it seems to me that if I were a man, and saw a pretty woman, I should say to myself: “Here is a poor creature who is sure to be stifled with compliments.” I would spare her; I would have pity on her; and if I wanted to find

favor, I would do her the honor to talk to her of something else than her unhappy face. But no, it is always, "You are pretty," and then, "You are pretty," and then "Pretty" again. Why, good heavens! we know it well enough. Shall I tell you the truth?—You men of fashion are nothing but confectioners in disguise.

Count. Well, madame, you are charming, take it as you will.—There's another ring. Good-by; I am off.

Mar. Wait now; I wanted to tell you—I forget what it was. Ah! do you pass Frossin's by any chance in your wanderings?

Count. It will not be by chance, madame, if I can be of any use to you.

Mar. Another compliment. Heavens, how you bore me! It is a ring I have broken. Of course, I could simply send it, but I must explain to you.

[*Taking the ring off her finger.*]

There, do you see? It is the setting. There is a little point here, you see, don't you? That used to open at the side, here. I knocked it against something this morning, and the spring got broken.

Count. Why, Marquisé—without wanting to be indiscreet—there was hair in it!

Mar. Very possibly. What are you laughing at?

Count. I am not laughing the least bit in the world.

Mar. You are an impertinent creature; it is my husband's hair. But I hear no one. Who was it rang again there?

Count. [*Looking out of window*]. Another little

girl, and another bandbox. One more bonnet, I presume. By the way, after all this, you owe me a confidence.

Mar. Do shut that door; you are freezing me.

Count. I'm just going. But you promise to repeat what was said to you about me, don't you, Marquisé?

Mar. Come to the ball this evening, and we will have a talk.

Count. Parbleu! Yes, talk in a ballroom! A nice spot for conversation, with trombone accompaniment and a clatter of glasses of *eau sucrée*. Some one walks on your toe, some one else shoves your elbow, while a powdered lackay stuffs an ice into your pocket. I put it to you, is that the place——?

Mar. Will you go or stay? I tell you again you are giving me a cold. Since no one is coming, what drives you away?

Count. [*Shutting the door and sitting down again.*] The fact is, do what I can, I feel in such bad humor that I am really afraid of wearing out your patience. Decidedly I must leave off coming to your house——

Mar. That is polite. And what has put that into your head?

Count. I don't know, but I bore you. You told me so yourself a moment ago, and I am quite conscious of it. What could be more natural? It is that unlucky lodging I have there opposite. I can't go out without looking at your windows, and I walk in here mechanically, without reflecting what I come for.

Mar. If I told you you were boring me this

morning, that was because it is unusual. Seriously, you pain me. I take great pleasure in seeing you——

Count. You? Not a bit. Do you know what I am going to do? I am going back to Italy.

Mar. Ah? And how will that suit mademoiselle?

Count. Mademoiselle who, please?

Mar. Mademoiselle—somebody. The young lady who is your protégée. What do I know of your ballet-girls' names?

Count. Ah! So that is the fine story they have been telling you about me?

Mar. Precisely. Do you deny it?

Count. It is a pack of rubbish.

Mar. It is unfortunate that you were very distinctly seen at the play in the company of a certain pink hat with flowers that only bloom at the opera. You haunt the side-scenes, my neighbor; all the world knows that.

Count. Like your marriage with M. Camus.

Mar. You still harp on that.

Count. Well, why not?

Mar. M. Camus is a very worthy man. He is a millionaire several times over. His age, though it is venerable enough, is exactly right for a husband. I am a widow. He is a bachelor. He looks very well when he has his gloves on.

Count. And a nightcap. That is sure to suit him.

Mar. Will you be good enough to stop, please? Do people mention such things?

Count. Why, yes, to anyone who may see them.

Mar. Apparently it is those young ladies who teach you your pretty manners.

Count. [*Getting up and taking his hat.*] Stop, Marquisé, I must say good-by. You would make me say something improper.

Mar. What excessive delicacy!

Count. No, but really, you are too cruel; it is bad enough to forbid me loving you, without accusing me of loving some one else.

Mar. Better and better. What a tragic tone! I forbade you to love me?

Count. Certainly; or to speak to you of it, at least.

Mar. Well, I give you leave. Let us hear your eloquence.

Count. If you meant that——

Mar. What does it matter to you, provided I say it?

Count. It matters this, that, even in joke, some one here might very probably run a risk.

Mar. Oh, oh! Grave perils, monsieur?

Count. Perhaps, madame. But, unfortunately, the danger would be only for me.

Mar. When one is afraid, one doesn't play at courage. Well, let me hear. You say nothing? You threaten me. I expose myself to your attack, and you don't stir. I was expecting at least to see you fling yourself at my feet like Rodérigo or M. Camus himself. In your place, he would be there already.

Count. So it amuses you greatly to laugh at us poor folks?

Mar. And so it surprises you extremely that anyone should dare to brave you to your face?

Count. Take care. If you are brave, I have been a hussar, let me tell you, madame, and that not so very long ago.

Mar. Really! Very well, then; by all means. A hussar proposal ought to be curious. I never saw one in all my life. Should you like me to call my lady's maid? I presume she will be able to take her part. You shall give me a performance.

[*Bell heard.*]

Count. That jingle again. Good-by, then, Marquisé. At all events, I won't let you off so.

[*He opens the door.*]

Mar. Till this evening, is it not? But what is that noise I hear?

Count. [*Looking out of the window.*] It is a change in the weather. It is raining and hailing, as hard as you please. There is a third bonnet coming for you, and I am greatly afraid there will be a cold inside it.

Mar. But is that din thunder? In the middle of January? How about the almanacs?

Count. No, it is only a hurricane, a kind of waterspout passing—

Mar. It is frightful. But do shut the door. You can't go out in this weather. What can cause such a thing?

Count. [*Shutting the door.*] Madame, it is the anger of heaven chastising panes of glass, umbrellas, ladies' ankles and the chimney-pots.

Mar. And my horses out.

Count. They are in no danger, unless something falls on their heads.

Mar. Oh, laugh away. It is your turn. I

am a very neat person, monsieur. I don't like my horses splashed. It is beyond belief. A moment ago there was the loveliest sky you could see——

Count. You may safely reckon, I can tell you, that with this hail you won't have anyone here. There is one of your days wasted——

Mar. Not at all, since you came. Do put down your hat. It worries me.

Count. A compliment, madame. Take care. You, who profess to hate them, might have yours taken for truth.

Mar. But I tell you so, and it is quite true. You give me great pleasure by coming to see me.

Count. [*Sitting down again near the Marquisé.*] Then let me love you.

Mar. But I tell you also, I am quite willing. It doesn't annoy me the least bit in the world.

Count. Then let me speak of it to you.

Mar. Hussar fashion, you mean?

Count. No, madame. Be assured that even in default of heart I have enough good sense to respect you. But it seems to me that one has certainly a right without offending a person one respects——

Mar. To wait till the rain is over, you mean. You came in here a moment ago without knowing why. You told me so yourself. You were bored; you didn't know what to do; you might have passed for being tolerably sulky. If you had found three people here, any three, no matter who, you would be there by the corner of the fire at the present moment, talking literature or

railroads, after which you would go and dine. So it is because I was alone that you think yourself bound all on a sudden, yes, bound in honor to make love to me; this same eternal, intolerable love-making, that is so useless, so ridiculous and so hackneyed an affair. Why, what have I done to you? Suppose a visitor comes in here, you will be witty, perhaps; but I am alone, and there you are more commonplace than an old couplet out of a comic opera, and in a moment you broach your subject; and if I chose to listen to you, you would administer a declaration to me—you would recite your love. Do you know what men look like under those circumstances? Like those poor hissed authors, who have always a manuscript in their pockets, some unpublished and unplayable tragedy, and pull out this to batter your ears with it as soon as you are left alone with them for a quarter of an hour.

Count. So you tell me that I don't displease you. I reply that I love you, and there is an end of it to your mind.

Mar. You love me no more than the Grand Turk.

Count. Oh, come now; that is too much. Listen to me for a single moment, and if you don't believe me sincere——

Mar. No, no, and no again! Good heavens! do you think I don't know what you could tell me? I have the highest opinion of your studies; but do you think, because you are an educated man, that I have read nothing? Listen! I used to know a clever man, who had bought somewhere or other a collection of fifty letters, not

badly composed, very neatly written — love letters, of course. These fifty letters were graduated, so as to compose a sort of little novel in which all situations were foreseen. There were some for declarations, some for moods of spleen or hope, for the moments of hypocrisy when one falls back on friendship, for quarrels, for despair, for fits of jealousy, for sulkiness, even for rainy days like this. I have read these letters. The author professed, in a sort of preface, to have employed them on his own account, and never to have found a woman who resisted beyond the thirty-third number. Well? I resisted the whole collection. I ask you whether I am well read or no, and whether you flatter yourself you could have anything new to teach me.

Count. You have cloyed your palate, Marquisé. You are jaded——

Mar. Insults? I prefer them; they are less insipid than your sugar plums.

Count. Yes, the plain truth is you are jaded.

Mar. You think so? Well, not a bit of it.

Count. Jaded as an old English woman with fourteen children.

Mar. As the feather that dances on my hat. So you imagine that it is a deep science to know you all by heart. Why, there is no study needed to learn that lesson; simply you have to be left to yourselves. Stop and think; it is a very simple calculation. Men chivalrous enough to respect our poor ears and never lapse into sugar plums are extremely rare. Again, it can not be disputed that in the sorry moments, when you try to turn pretty phrases, you are all as like one

another as a row of cards. Happily for us, heaven's justice has placed at your disposal a very limited vocabulary. You have only one tune among you, as they say, so that the mere hearing of the same phrases, the mere repetition of the same words, and the same studied gestures, the same tender looks, the mere spectacle of all these different faces which may in themselves be more or less passable, but which at these fatal moments all assume the same humbly victorious expression, is enough to work our salvation by laughter, or, at least, by sheer weariness. If I had a daughter, and if I wished to guard her against what are called dangerous advances, I should take good care not to forbid her to listen to her partner's effusions. I would simply tell her: "Do not listen to one only; listen to all. Don't shut the book; don't mark the page; leave it open; let these gentlemen play their little farces before you. If, by ill luck, there is one that pleases you, don't resist the feeling. Only wait; there will come another, identically the same, who will disgust you with the pair of them. You are fifteen, let me say. Well, my child, that will go on so till thirty, and it will be always the same thing." There is the history and the science I know; do you call this being jaded?

Count. Horribly so, if what you say is true; and it seems to me so far from natural that the doubt might be allowed.

Mar. What matter to me whether you believe or no?

Count. Better still. Is it really possible? What, you, at your age, despise love? The words of a man who loves you affect you like a

trashy novel. His looks, gestures, sentiments seem like a comedy to you. You pride yourself on candor, and you see nothing but lies in the rest of the world. But where do you come from, Marquisé? Who is it has given you these maxims of yours?

Mar. I have come a long way, neighbor mine.

Count. Yes, from your nurse. Women fancy they know everything in the world. They know nothing at all. I put the question to you—what experience can you have? That of the traveler who had seen a red-haired woman at his inn, and set himself to note in his journal: “The women have red hair in this country.”

Mar. I begged you to put a log on the fire.

Count. [*Putting on the log*]. That a woman should be a prude is conceivable; that she should say no, should stop her ears, should hate love, is possible; but to deny its existence, that is a pretty joke. You discourage a poor devil by telling him, “I know what you are going to tell me.” But has he not the right to reply, “Yes, madame, you know perhaps; and I too know what men say when they love; but when I speak to you I forget it.” There is nothing new under the sun. But I say in my turn, “What does that prove?”

Mar. Come, at least, this is better; you are talking capitably. This is the next thing to a book.

Count. Yes, I am talking; and I am assuring you that if you are such as it is your pleasure to seem, I pity you most sincerely.

Mar. Don't let me check you; make yourself at home.

Count. There is nothing in that to wound you. If you have the right to attack us, may we not reasonably defend ourselves? When you compare us to hissed authors, what is the stone you think you are throwing? Why, heaven help us! if love is a comedy——

Mar. The fire is burning badly; that log is crooked.

Count. [*Arranging the fire*]. If love is a comedy, that world-old comedy, hissed or not, is still, after all is said and done, the best performance that has been invented. The parts are hackneyed, I admit; but if the play were worthless, the whole universe would not know it by heart; and I am wrong to call it old. Is that old which is immortal?

Mar. Monsieur, this is poetry.

Count. No, madame; but these stale speeches, this balderdash that bores you, these compliments, declarations, and all the doting nonsense are excellent old things, conventional if you like, wearisome if you like, sometimes ridiculous, but all of them accompaniments to another thing which is always young.

Mar. You are getting confused. What is it that is always old, and what is it that is always young?

Count. Love.

Mar. Monsieur, this is eloquence.

Count. No, madame. I mean this: That love is eternally young, and that the ways of expressing it are, and will remain, eternally old. The worn out formulas, the iterations, those

tags of novels, that issue from your heart, you can not say why, and all this pomp and circumstance are just a procession of old chamberlains, old diplomats, old ministers, just the chatter of a king's ante-chamber; all these pass, but the king never dies. Love is dead; long live Love!

Mar. Love?

Count. Love. And even suppose one were merely fancying——

Mar. Give me the fire-screen there.

Count. This one?

Mar. No, the brocaded one. Your fire is putting out my eyes now.

Count. [*Handing the screen to the Marquis*]. Even suppose it were merely fancy that one is in love, is not that a charming thing?

Mar. But I tell you it is always the same thing.

Count. And always new, as the song says. Why, what would you have us invent? Apparently you must be loved in Hebrew! That Venus there on your clock is also always the same thing; is she less beautiful for that, pray? If you are like your grandmother, are you the less pretty for that?

Mar. That's right, there is the chorus; pretty. Give me that cushion near you.

Count. [*Taking the cushion and holding it in his hand*]. That Venus is made to be beautiful, to be loved and admired, that does not bore her in the least. If the splendid figure Milo conceived ever had a living model, assuredly that great strapping wench had more lovers than she needed, and let herself be loved like anyone else,

like her cousin Astarte, like Aspasia and Manon Lescaut.

Mar. Monsieur, this is mythology.

Count. [*Still holding the cushion*]. No, madame, I can not say how painful to me is the sight of this fashionable indifference, this mocking, disdainful coldness, this air of experience that reduces everything to nothing, in a young woman. You are not the first in whom I meet it; it is a disease that is going the round of the drawing-rooms. People turn aside, or yawn, as you do at this moment, and say that love is a thing not to be talked of. Then why do you wear lace? What is that tuft of feathers doing in your hair?

Mar. And what is that cushion doing in your hand? I asked you for it to put under my feet.

Count. Well then, there it is, and there am I, too, and whether you will or no, I will make you a declaration, as old as the streets, and as stupid as a goose, for I am furious with you.

[*He puts the cushion on the ground before the Marquisé, and kneels down on it.*]

Mar. Will you do me the favor to rise, if you please?

Count. No; you must listen to me first.

Mar. You won't get up?

Count. No, no, and no again, as you said a moment ago, unless you consent to hear me.

Mar. Then I have the honor to wish you a good-morning.

[*Rising.*]

Count. [*Still on his knees*]. Marquisé, in

heaven's name, this is too cruel. You will madden me. You drive me to despair.

Mar. You will recover at the Café de Paris.

Count. [*In the same position*]. No, upon my honor. I speak from my heart. I will admit as much as you please that I came in here without any purpose. I only meant to pay you a passing visit; witness this door, that I opened three times to go. The conversation we have just had, your raillery, your very coldness, drew me on further perhaps than was right; but it is not to-day only, it is since the first day I saw you that I have loved you, that I have adored you. There is no exaggeration in the words I use. Yes, for more than a year I have adored you. I have dreamed—

Mar. Adieu!

[*Exit the Marquisé, leaving the door open.*]

Count. [*Left alone, remains a moment longer on his knees, then rises*]. It is a positive fact that the door is icy.

[*He is going out, and sees the Marquisé.*]

Count. Ah, Marquisè, you are laughing at me.

Mar. [*Leaning against the half-open door*]. So you have found your feet.

Count. Yes; and I am going, never to see you again.

Mar. Come to the ball this evening; I am keeping a valse for you.

Count. I will never, never see you again. I am in despair; I am lost.

Mar. What is the matter with you?

Count. I am lost. I love you like a child. I

swear to you on all that is most sacred in the world——

Mar. Adieu!

[*She is going out.*]

Count. It is for me to leave, madame. Stay, I beg of you. I feel how much I have to suffer——

Mar. [*In a serious tone*]. Let us make an end now, monsieur. What do you want with me?

Count. Why, madame, I wish—I would like

Mar. What? For, in short, you wear out my patience. Do you imagine that I am going to be your mistress, and succeed to your pink bonnets? I warn you that an idea of that kind does more than displease me. It is revolting.

Count. You, Marquisé? Great heavens! If it were possible, it would be my whole life I would lay at your feet. It would be my name, my property, my honor itself, that I would wish to entrust to you. I, to confound you for a single instant, I do not merely say with those creatures of whom you only speak to vex me, but with any woman in the world! Could you really suppose it? Do you believe me so devoid of sense? Has my levity or my folly gone so far then as to make you doubt my respect? Can you, who were telling me a moment ago that you took some pleasure in seeing me, felt perhaps some friendship for me; is it not true, Marquisé? Can you think that a man whom you have thus distinguished, whom you have found worthy of so precious and so sweet an indul-

gence, would not know your worth? Why, am I blind, or mad? You my mistress? No, but my wife.

Mar. Oh! very well. If you had told me that on arriving, we should not have quarrelled. So you want to marry me?

Count. Why, undoubtedly! I am dying to. I never dared to tell you, but for this last year I have been thinking of nothing else. I would give my life blood to be allowed the faintest hope.

Mar. Wait now. You are richer than I.

Count. Oh dear, no; I don't think so. And what does that matter to you? I entreat of you, don't let us talk of these things. Your smile at this moment makes me shiver with hope and fear. One word, for pity's sake. My life is in your hands.

Mar. I am going to tell you two proverbs. The first is, Never play at cross purposes.

Count. Then what I have dared to tell you does not displease you?

Mar. Oh no! Here is my second proverb: A door must be either open or shut. Now for three-quarters of an hour here has this door, thanks to you, been neither one nor the other, and the room is perfectly icy. Consequence again—you are going to give me your arm to take me to dine at my mother's. After that you will go to Frossin's.

Count. Frossin's, madame? For what reason?

Mar. My ring.

Count. Ah, that is true! I had forgotten all about it. Well then, your ring, Madame.

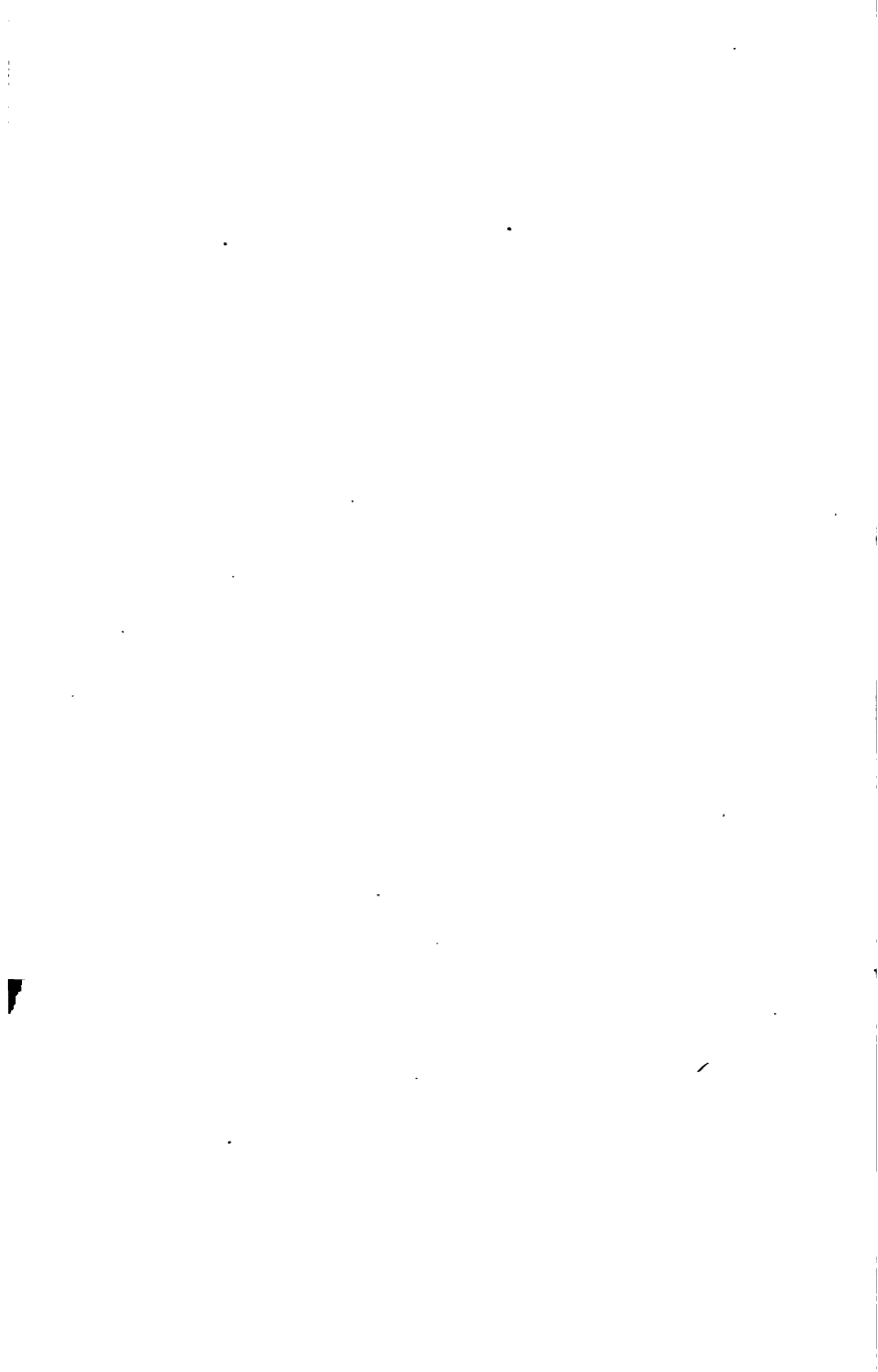
Mar. Marquisé, you say. Well then, on my ring there happens to be in the setting a little Marquisé's coronet, and as that may be used for a seal, tell me, Count, what do you think? Perhaps the strawberry leaves will have to be taken off. There, I am going to put on my bonnet.

Count. You overwhelm me with joy. How am I to express——?

Mar. But do shut that unhappy door. This room will never be fit to live in again.

A CAPRICE

COMEDY IN ONE ACT



DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

M. DE CHAVIGNY.

MATHILDE.

MADAME DE LERY.

Scene—Mathilde's Room.



A CAPRICE

SCENE I

Mathilde. [*Alone, sewing*]. One more stitch and I shall be through.

[*She rings; a servant enters.*]

Has anyone come from Janisset's?

Servant. No, madam, not yet.

Math. This is provoking; make haste, tell them to come at once.

[*The servant goes out.*]

I shall have to take the first thing I can get; it is eight o'clock; he is now dressing for the evening; I am sure he will come before it is ready. That will put it off another day.

[*She rises.*]

Making purses on the sly for one's husband would be very well for romantic young people. After a year of married life! What would Madame de Léry say if she knew it? And what will he think of it? Very likely he will laugh at the mystery in which I have shrouded the affair, but he will not laugh at the gift. But why all this

mystery? I am sure I do not know; it seems to me I would not have worked with such good will in his presence; it would look as though I were saying, "See how much I think of you!" There would have been something bordering on a reproach in that, while in showing him my little piece of handiwork all finished, it will be he who will say that I have thought of him.

Servant. [Returning with a package]. This has just come from the jeweler.

Math. At last!

[She sits down again.]

Let me know when M. de Chavigny arrives.

[Exit servant.]

Now, my dear little purse, we are ready to make your last toilet. Let us see if you will not be something of a coquette, arrayed in all this finery. Not so bad. Now I think you ought to be cordially welcomed. You will speak of all the pleasure I have taken in making you, all the care bestowed on your little person. You are not expected, mademoiselle. You were not fit to be seen until you had donned your best. Will you have a kiss for your pains?

[She kisses the purse, then checks herself.]

Poor little thing! You are not worth much; you are not worth much; you would not sell for two louis. Why should I feel sad at the idea of parting from you? Did I not try to finish you as soon as possible? Ah! the beginning was better than the end. And I have known you only fifteen days; fifteen days, is it possible? I fear we are going to be late, my little one. Some one is coming; I believe it is he; he still loves me.

Servant. [*Entering*]. Madam, here is the count.

Math. Ah, heavens! I have only one ribbon in place, and I have forgotten the other. How stupid? Let him wait a minute, just one minute, in the parlor; quick, before he enters——

Servant. Here he comes, madam.

[*Exit. Mathilde hides the purse.*]

SCENE II

Mathilde. Chavigny.

Chavigny. Good evening, my dear; do I disturb you?

[*He sits down.*]

Math. Disturb me, Henry? What a question!

Chav. You appear to be troubled about something. When I enter your room, I always forget that I am your husband, and I open the door too abruptly.

Math. Now that is unkind, but as it is also an evidence that you love me, I willingly pardon you.

[*She kisses him.*]

What are you thinking of, my dear, when you forget that you are my husband?

Chav. That I am your lover, my beauty. Am I mistaken?

Math. You are both lover and friend.

[*Aside*].

I have a mind to give him the purse just as it is.

Chav. What dress is that you are wearing? You are not going out then?

Math. No; I would like—— I thought that perhaps——

Chav. What did you think?

Math. You are going to the ball? You are looking so well!

Chav. Indeed! I do not know whether it is my fault or the tailor's, but I have lost my soldierly bearing.

Math. Wretch! You have forgotten me, admiring yourself in the glass!

Chav. Bah! Of whom could I be thinking, if not of you? Do you think I am going to the ball this evening to dance? I assure you it is a bore, and I am going merely from a sense of duty.

Math. Well, in that case stay with me. We shall be alone, and I will tell you——

Chav. It seems to me the clock is gaining time; it can not be so late.

Math. No one goes to the ball at such an hour as this, no matter what may be said of the clock. We have just come from the table.

Chav. I have ordered the carriage; I have a call to make.

Math. Ah! that is different; I—I did not know—— I supposed that——

Chav. Well?

Math. I supposed that after what you said—— But the clock is right; it is only eight. Spare me just a moment of your time. I have a little surprise for you.

Chav. [*Rising*]. You know, my dear, that I allow you every liberty, and you go out whenever

you please. It is only right that you should accord me the same freedom. What surprise have you prepared for me?

Math. Nothing at all, I assure you. I did not say anything about a surprise.

Chav. Then I was mistaken; I thought I heard you say something about a surprise. Have you those Strauss waltzes there? Let me take them, if you are not using them.

Math. Here they are; do you want them now?

Chav. Yes, if it is not too much trouble. I want to loan them to a friend for a few days.

Math. Is it for Madame de Blainville?

Chav. [*Taking the waltzes*]. Why do you mention Madame de Blainville's name?

Math. I? I did not say anything about Madame de Blainville.

Chav. This time I am sure I am not mistaken.

[*Sitting down.*]

What did you say about Madame de Blainville?

Math. I thought perhaps my waltzes were for her.

Chav. And why did you think so?

Math. Why, because—because she admires them.

Chav. Yes, and so do I, and you too, I think. There is one in particular; how does it go? I have forgotten—

Math. I do not know which one you refer to.

[*She sits down and plays.*]

Chav. That is it! It is charming, divine, and

you play it like an angel; or better still, you play it like an accomplished dancer.

Math. Do I play it as well as she, Henry?

Chav. Who? Madame de Blainville? You are still harping on that name?

Math. Oh! not at all. If I were a man, that woman would never turn my head.

Chav. You are right, madam. No man should allow his head to be turned either by a woman or a waltz.

Math. Do you intend to play cards this evening?

Chav. Why, my dear, what put that idea in your head? A man may gamble, but he never sets out with the deliberate intention of doing so.

Math. Have you any money in you pocket?

Chav. Perhaps I have. Do you want some?

Math. I? Great heavens! What should I want of money? Dear Henry, you are so noble and kind. Do you remember one day, when I had a little debt to pay, and you complained of having no purse?

Chav. What of it? Yes, it is annoying to go out somewhere and find your pockets empty——

Math. Would you like to have a red purse with a black clasp?

Chav. No, I do not like red. By the way, that reminds me that I have just had a purse given to me, a present I received only yesterday. What do you think of it?

[*He draws it from his pocket*].

Is it the proper thing?

Math. Let me see it.

Chav. Here it is.

[*He hands her the purse; she examines it, then returns it.*]

Math. It is very pretty. What color is it?

Chav. [*Laughing*]. What color is it? That's a fine question to ask.

Math. Oh! I mean—— I was wondering who gave it to you.

Chav. Ah! that is rich! 'Pon my honor, your curiosity is delicious.

Servant. [*Announcing a caller*]. Madame de Léry.

Math. I gave orders that I was not at home.

Chav. No, no; let her come right in. Why not receive her?

Math. Very well, sir; but that purse, aren't you going to tell me who made it?

SCENE III

Mathilde, Chavigny, Madame de Léry, in evening dress.

Chav. Come in, madam; pray, be seated; you have come quite apropos. Mathilde has just committed a blunder that is too good to keep. I was showing this purse——

Madame de Léry. Why, how pretty! Let me see it.

Chav. I was showing her this purse; she examined it carefully, turned it over and over in her hand, then gave it back to me, and what do you suppose she asked me? She wanted to know what color it was.

M. de L. Why, it is blue.

Chav. Yes, it is blue, there is no doubt about that; and that is just the joke of it. Can you imagine anyone asking such a question?

M. de L. A very good joke, I must say. Good evening, dear Mathilde; are you going to the embassy to-night?

Math. No, I intend to remain at home.

Chav. But why don't you laugh at my story?

M. de L. But tell me, who made that purse? Ah! I recognize it. It came from Madame de Blainville. Why, what is the matter?

Chav. [*Brusquely*]. How do you recognize it, if you please?

M. de L. By its color. I have watched it dragging along for years; in fact, it was seven years in process of construction, and you may judge for yourself whether it has not changed its destination more than once during that time. It has been intended for three different people to my knowledge. You possess a treasure, Monsieur de Chavigny; that purse is a veritable heirloom.

Chav. One might suppose there was only one purse in the world.

M. de L. Well, there is only one blue purse. In the first place, blue is very distasteful to me; I can not bear it. Whenever I see anything blue, I never forget it. I love lilac as much as I detest blue.

Math. It is the color of constancy.

M. de L. Bah! It is the color of wigmakers. Well, I just dropped in on my way to the ball, and it is so crowded at the embassy that one has to go early. Why do you stay away? I would not miss it for the world.

Math. I had not thought of going, and it is too late now.

M. de L. You have plenty of time. Come, my dear, I am going to ring for a servant. We will put Monsieur de Chavigny out of the room, and I will help you dress. My carriage is at the door, and we shall arrive in good time.

Math. No, you must excuse me this evening.

M. de L. Is that your final decision? Come, Monsieur de Chavigny, make your wife mind me.

Chav. [*Dryly*]. I never meddle with her affairs.

M. de L. Oh! yes, I understand; you are so fond of blue! Well, do you know what I am going to do? Give me some tea, and I will spend the evening here.

Math. How good of you, dear Ernestine! No, I am unwilling to deprive you of the pleasure of attending the ball. Go to the embassy, and dance part of the evening, and then return here at twelve, if you will; we will have a little talk all by ourselves, since Monsieur de Chavigny abandons us.

Chav. I? Not at all; I do not know that I shall go out.

M. de L. Very well! It is agreed! I leave you. By the way, have you heard of my latest misfortune? I have been robbed.

Math. Robbed? What do you mean?

M. de L. Four dresses, my dear; four lovely dresses from London; lost while going through the custom inspection. If you had seen them, you would have wept. There was one Persian

and one puce colored silk; such dresses will never be made again.

Math. I am so sorry! Were they confiscated?

M. de L. Oh, no! If that were all, I would make such a fuss about it that they would have to return them, for that would be as bad as murder. So here I am without a thing to wear all summer. Just think of it! They rummaged about in my trunks at such a furious rate that they tore three holes in my dresses large enough to put your finger through. That is what was brought to me for breakfast yesterday.

Chav. They were not blue, were they?

M. de L. No, they were not. Adieu, my dear. Bonsoir, Mr. Blue—— If you will kindly conduct me to my carriage, I will promise to return.

SCENE IV

Chavigny. Mathilde.

Chav. What a madcap she is! I must say you choose your friends well.

Math. It was you who insisted on receiving her.

Chav. I will wager that you think Madame de Blainville made my purse.

Math. No, not if you deny it.

Chav. I am sure you think so.

Math. And why are you so sure?

Chav. Because I know your disposition; Madame de L ry is your oracle; you believe everything she says.

Math. You give me credit for more credulity than I possess.

Chav. And I would much prefer to have you frank and open about it.

Math. But if I do not think so, you surely do not expect me to pretend that I do merely to appear sincere?

Chav. I tell you, you do think so; it is written on your face.

Math. If it will give you any pleasure, I will say that I do think so.

Chav. You do think so? And suppose it is true, then what?

Math. Nothing, and that is why I do not understand your motive in denying it.

Chav. I do not deny it; it is the truth.

[*He rises*].

Well, I shall return soon and take tea with your friend.

Math. Henry, do not leave me thus.

Chav. Why do you say *thus*? Have we quarrelled? I do not see what there it to get excited about; some one makes a purse for me, and I accept it; you ask me who made it, and I tell you. Nothing could be farther from a quarrel than that.

Math. And if I should ask you for that purse, would you give it to me?

Chav. Perhaps. What good would it do you?

Math. Never mind; I ask you to give it to me.

Chav. You do not want to carry it, do you? I would like to know what you want to do with it.

Math. I want to carry it.

Chav. What a joke! You carry a purse made by Madame de Blainville?

Math. Why not? You carry it willingly enough.

Chav. For a very good reason, I am not a woman.

Math. Very well, if I must not carry it, I will throw it in the fire.

Chav. Ah! at last you are sincere. Very well, I will be equally sincere, and tell you that I intend to keep it.

Math. You surely have the right to do so, but I confess that I think it is cruel in you to carry a purse that everyone knows was given you by another woman.

Chav. Everyone will say it is a trophy.

Math. Listen to me, I beg of you, and give me your hand.

[*She kisses him*].

Do you love me, Henry? Answer me.

Chav. I love you and I listen to you.

Math. I assure you I am not jealous, but if you will give me that purse, I will thank you with all my heart. I propose a little exchange, and I assure you, you shall not lose by it.

Chav. Let me see what you offer in exchange; what is it?

Math. I am going to tell you, if you will be patient; but if you will give me the purse first, upon my honor, you will make me very happy.

Chav. No, not on those terms.

Math. Come, Henry, I ask it as a favor.

Chav. No.

Math. See, I implore you on bended knee,

Chav. Rise, Mathilde, I beg of you; you know I do not like such displays. I do not like to see anyone kneel under any circumstances, and I see no occasion for it now. You ought not to insist on the gratification of a childish whim; if you are serious, I will throw that purse into the fire myself. Come, get up, and let us say no more about it. Adieu, for this evening; I shall return.

SCENE V

Math. [*Alone*]. Since I can not get that one, I will burn the other.

[*She goes to the secretary and takes out her purse.*]

Poor little thing, let me kiss you. Do you remember what I told you? We are too late; he does not care for you, nor for me either.

[*She approaches the fireplace*].

How foolish it is to dream! Dreams never come true. What is the cause of that strange attraction, that irresistible charm that attaches to a cherished idea? Why do we take such pleasure in fondling it, in executing it in secret? And what is the result? Tears! How pitiless is chance! What precautions, what prayers for the gratification of the slightest wish, the indulgence of the most childish whim! Yes, he was right; it was very childish in me, but my little surprise was so dear to me. And he, too proud or too unfaithful, would not grant me an indulgence that would have cost him so little. Ah! he no longer loves me. He loves you, Madame de Blainville!

[*She weeps.*]

Well, I must stop thinking about it. I shall throw this miserable toy into the fire; if I had given it to him to-night, he would probably have lost it to-morrow. Ah! yes, he would have left my purse here or there or anywhere, while he carefully preserved the other! How proudly he drew it from his pocket and flaunted it in my face! How complacently he threw it on the table to hear the gold it contained jingle! Wretch that I am, I am jealous! That was all I needed to make me hate him!

[*She prepares to throw the purse into the fire, then checks herself.*]

But what have you done? Why destroy you, poor bauble, which these hands have fashioned? It was not your fault; you shared my hopes and fears. Your fresh color did not leave you during that cruel scene; you are pretty, and I love you; you represent fifteen days of my life. Ah! no, the hand which created you shall not destroy you; it shall preserve you and keep you as a memento of happy days. You shall lie on my heart, and you shall be at the same time a good and an evil omen; you shall remind me of my love for him, his cruelty, his caprices; and, who knows? concealed in my bosom, he will perhaps return to find you there.

[*She sits down and prepares to attach the missing ribbon.*]

SCENE VI

Mathilde. Madame de Léry.

M. de L. [*Behind the scenes*]. No one here! What does it mean? Why, one might as well be in a deserted mill.

[*She opens the door, and begins to announce herself*].

Madame de Léry!

[*She enters; Mathilde rises*].

Good evening again, my dear; where are your servants? I have been looking everywhere for some one. Ah! I am tired out.

[*She sits down.*]

Math. Pray, remove your furs.

M. de L. In a moment; I am freezing now. Do you like this fox skin? It is said to be an African marten, but I am sure, I know nothing about it. *M. de Léry* brought it from Holland. I think it is hideous, and I intend to wear it a few times out of politeness, and then I shall give it to Ursula.

Math. A chambermaid could not wear that.

M. de L. That is so; well, I will make a little rug out of it.

Math. Was the ball fine?

M. de L. Ah! that ball! But I did not go. You would never guess what happened to me.

Math. You did not go to the ball?

M. de L. Yes, I went, but I did not enter. But it was too funny. Just think of it! People standing in line—in line——

[*She bursts out laughing*].

Do you enjoy getting in a crowd?

Math. No, and I do not like to see the carriages wedged together in the street.

M. de L. It is terrible when one is alone. I shouted to the coachman to drive on, but he could not budge. I was so angry I had a good notion to get up on the box and drive myself. I assure you I would have forced the horses right through the crowd. It was very disagreeable, I assure you; and then it was raining in torrents. But I amused myself for half an hour watching the people splashing about in the mud. That is the way I attended the ball. This fire feels good.

[*She takes off her furs. Mathilde rings. A servant enters.*]

Math. The tea.

[*The servant goes out.*]

M. de L. Monsieur de Chavigny has gone out?

Math. Yes, I think he has gone to the ball, and he will be more persevering than you were.

M. de L. Between you and me, I think he dislikes me.

Math. Oh! no, you are mistaken, I assure you; he has told me a hundred times that he considered you one of the prettiest women in Paris.

M. de L. Indeed? That was very polite in him. But I do not deserve his ill will, for I like him very much. Have you a pin?

Math. You have one beside you.

M. de L. That Palmire makes dresses without shoulders; one feels as though the whole

thing was about to slip off. Did she make those sleeves of yours?

Math. Yes.

M. de L. Very pretty, very pretty, indeed. There is nothing flat and ugly about those sleeves. But unless one is large and stout, one is apt to look like a grasshopper, with a large body and little feet.

Math. I like the comparison.

[*The tea is brought in.*]

M. de L. Why, just look at Mademoiselle Saint-Ange. And everyone goes into ecstasies over the Marchioness d'Ermont; as for me, I think she looks like a gibbet. She has a beautiful head, I admit, but it is the head of a madonna on the end of a stick.

Math. [*Laughing*]. Shall I give you some tea, my dear?

M. de L. Nothing but some warm water, with just a suspicion of tea and a spray of milk.

Math. [*Pouring the tea*]. Are you going to Madame d'Egley's to-morrow? I will take you, if you like.

M. de L. Ah! Madame d'Egley! She is another with her curls and her slender limbs; she looks like one of these brooms used for sweeping away cobwebs.

[*She drinks*].

But, of course, I shall go. No, I can not go; I am going to a concert.

Math. It is true, she is rather queer.

M. de L. Look at me, please.

Math. Why?

M. de L. Look me in the face frankly.

Math. Why, what do you find so strange in me?

M. de L. Your eyes are red, you have been weeping, that is as plain as day. What has happened, my dear Mathilde?

Math. Nothing, I assure you. What do you think has happened?

M. de L. I do not know, but you have been crying; I disturb you; I must go.

Math. No, I beg of you, remain.

M. de L. Do you mean it? I remain if you do, but you must tell me your trouble.

[*Mathilde shakes her head*].

No? Then I shall go, for you must know that if I can be of no service to you, I may be in the way.

Math. Remain; your presence is good for me, your conversation amuses me, and if I had anything on my mind, your cheerful humor would drive it away.

M. de L. How good of you to say so. Perhaps you think me light-headed; no one is more serious than I when serious matters are to be discussed. I do not understand why anyone should trifle with the affections of the heart, and for that reason I am sometimes accused of being deficient in sympathy by those who are disposed to make light of such matters. I know what it is to suffer; I learned that sad lesson at an early age. I also know what it is to tell one's sorrows to another. If your grief is of such a nature that it can be confided to me, speak freely; it is not curiosity which impels me to ask you to share your sorrow with me.

Math. I believe you are true and sincere, but

I hope you will excuse me if I refuse to divulge my secret.

M. de L. Ah! I have it! It is the blue purse. I made a stupid blunder in mentioning Madame de Blainville's name. I thought of it when I took my leave. Has M. de Chavigny been paying court to her?

[Mathilde rises, and being unable to reply, turns aside and wipes her eyes with her handkerchief].

Is it possible?

[A long silence. Mathilde walks up and down, and then sits down at the other end of the room. Madame de L ry seems to reflect. She rises and approaches Mathilde, who holds out her hand to her].

You know, my dear, the dentists tell us to cry when it hurts. I tell you weep, shed tears, both bitter and sweet, for tears are a solace.

Math. Ah! I am so unhappy!

M. de L. But such a thing is incredible! It is not possible that he loves Madame de Blainville; she is a coquette, and has neither wit nor beauty. She is not worth your little finger; no one forsakes an angel for such a fury.

Math. *[Sobbing]*. I am sure he loves her, I am sure of it.

M. de L. No, my child, it is out of the question; it is a caprice, a whim. I know M. de Chavigny better than you think; he may be thoughtless at times, but he is not bad. Did you weep in his presence?

Math. Oh! no, never!

M. de L. You were wise; he would have been pleased to see you shed tears.

Math. Pleased?

M. de L. Yes, pleased. I have not lived twenty-five years for nothing. How did it all come about?

Math. Why—I hardly know——

M. de L. Speak. Are you afraid of me? I want to prove that I am worthy of your confidence, and I am willing to give you proof of mine. Question me and see if I tell you the truth.

Math. You are my best friend; I shall tell you everything, for I know I can trust you. It is nothing very serious, as you shall see. I have been preparing a little surprise for M. de Chavigny, a little purse, and I was about to offer it to him to-day; for the last fifteen days I have seen very little of him; he has been spending his time with Madame de Blainville. In offering him that purse I hoped to remind him that he had been neglecting me, but at the very moment I was going to give him my purse he drew another from his pocket.

M. de L. Why, there is nothing to cry about in that.

Math. But I was so stupid as to ask him for that other purse.

M. de L. Ah! that was not diplomatic.

Math. No, Ernestine, and he refused to give it to me—and then—I am ashamed to confess——

M. de L. And then?

Math. Then I begged for it on my knees. I wanted him to make a little sacrifice for me, and I would have given him my purse in exchange for his. I begged him——

M. de L. And he refused; that goes without saying. Poor child! He is not worthy of you.

Math. Oh! no, do not say that!

M. de L. You are right; I express myself badly. He is worthy of you, and you love him, but he is a man and proud. What a pity! Where is your purse?

Math. Here it is on the table.

M. de L. Why, this purse is much prettier than his. It is not blue and it is charming. Let me take it; I warrant you I will make him change his mind about it.

Math. Here it is; but you must return it.

M. de L. How I detest that Madame de Blainville with her indigo! She has such ugly bulging eyes and a double chin. Mathilde, I tell you what we will do. It will not cost anything to try it. Your husband will return this evening?

Math. I think so.

M. de L. He will return, you may be sure of it. How is your courage this evening? When I have an idea, I have to seize it or it escapes me. I am sure I shall succeed.

Math. Give your orders, I will obey.

M. de L. Go dress yourself as hastily as possible and get into my carriage. I do not intend to send you to the ball, but you must pretend that you have been there. You may drive where you please, to Les Invalides or the Bastille. That will not be very exciting for you, but you might as well be there as here. Do you agree? Now take your purse and wrap it up in this paper on which I am going to write the address. There,

that is done. At the corner of the street you will stop; you will order my coachman to bring this little package here and deliver it to the first servant he encounters without any explanations.

Math. But tell me what you intend to do.

M. de L. No, that is impossible. Once for all, can you trust me?

Math. Yes, with all my heart.

M. de L. Well then, make haste, I hear a carriage in the street.

Math. It is he; I hear his voice in the court.

M. de L. Hurry then! Is there a secret stairway here?

Math. Yes, fortunately. But my hair is not dressed. How can I pretend to have been to the ball?

M. de L. [*Taking some flowers from her hair and handing them to Mathilde*]. Here, arrange these on the way.

[*Exit Mathilde.*]

M. de L. [*Alone*]. On her knees! Such a woman on her knees! And that man refused to listen to her request! A woman of twenty, beautiful as an angel, faithful as a greyhound! She begs that he will deign to accept a purse she has made in exchange for a gift from Madame de Blainville! What an abyss is the heart of man! Ah! we are better than they.

[*She sits down and takes a magazine from the table. An instant later some one knocks at the door*].

Come in!

SCENE VIII

Madame de Léry. Chavigny.

M. de L. [*Engrossed in her magazine*]. Good evening, Count. Will you have some tea?

Chav. Thank you, I never drink it.

[*He sits down and looks about him.*]

M. de L. Did you enjoy yourself at the ball?

Chav. Were you not there?

M. de L. Now that is a gallant question. No, I was not there, but I have sent Mathilde, for whom you seem to be looking.

Chav. You are joking.

M. de L. You think so? But pardon me, I am very much interested in this article in the "Revue."

[*Silence. Chavigny becomes uneasy, and begins to walk the floor.*]

Chav. Is it true that Mathilde has gone to the ball?

M. de L. Why, yes; you see that I am waiting for her.

Chav. That is strange; she said she did not care to go, when you proposed it to her.

M. de L. She changed her mind apparently.

Chav. Why did she not go with you?

M. de L. Because I did not care to go.

Chav. She hired a passing carriage?

M. de L. No, she took mine. Have you read this magazine article?

Chav. What article?

M. de L. In the "Revue des Deux Mondes;"

a very entertaining article by Madame Sand on the orang-outangs.

Chav. On the——?

M. de L. On the orang-outangs. Oh! no, I am mistaken; that is on the other page; it is very amusing.

Chav. I do not understand why she should go to the ball without saying a word to me about it. I would at least have come home with her.

M. de L. Do you like Madame Sand's stories?

Chav. No, not at all. But if she was there, why did I not see her?

M. de L. Who? George Sand?

Chav. You are pleased to be facetious.

M. de L. Perhaps; but to whom did you refer?

Chav. My wife, of course.

M. de L. Did you leave her in my charge? Am I her keeper?

Chav. You are right; I do you an injustice. I am going to look for her.

M. de L. Ah! you can never find her in that crowd.

Chav. Yes, that is so. I shall wait.

[*He sits down before the fire.*]

M. de L. [*Dropping her magazine*]. Do you know, M. de Chavigny, that you astonish me? I understood you to say that you allowed your wife perfect freedom, and that she could come and go as she pleased.

Chav. Certainly, you see the proof of it.

M. de L. Not at all; you are furious with anger.

Chav. I? Why, I am perfectly calm.

M. de L. You can not sit still a minute. You are another man, you are so much affected that I confess if I had foreseen this, I would not have loaned Mathilde my carriage.

Chav. But I assure you, I think it was the most natural thing in the world, and I thank you for it.

M. de L. No, no, you do not thank me for it. I am sure that you are as angry as you can be. To tell you the truth, I believe she decided to go just because she thought she might meet you there.

Chav. Indeed! Then why did she not accompany me?

M. de L. Yes, that is just what I said. We are accustomed to change our minds with the wind; we will not, and then we will. Do have some tea.

Chav. No, it is not good for me.

M. de L. Well then, give me some.

Chav. I beg your pardon, madam?

M. de L. You may give me some.

[*Chavigny rises and pours a cup of tea, which he offers Madame de L ry.*]

M. de L. It is very good; put it there. Did you have a minister at the ball this evening?

Chav. I do not know.

M. de L. Those balls at the embassy are so funny; one enters the room without knowing why, and passes through as though part of a procession of marionettes.

Chav. Why do you not drink your tea? It is getting cold.

M. de L. You did not put any sugar in it. Two lumps please.

Chav. Certainly.

M. de L. Now a little milk.

Chav. Is that all?

M. de L. A drop of hot water. Hand me the cup.

Chav. [*Offering her the cup*]. Here it is, but it is not fit to drink.

M. de L. Are you so sure of it?

Chav. There is no doubt about it.

M. de L. And why is it not fit to drink?

Chav. Because it is cold and too sweet.

M. de L. Very well; if that is so, you may throw it away.

[*Chavigny stands before her, holding the cup; Madame de L ry watches him and laughs at him*].

Oh! how funny you are! I have never seen anything so comical.

[*Chavigny, becoming impatient, empties the cup in the fire, and walks up and down the room in anger.*]

Chav. What a fool I am!

M. de L. I have never seen jealousy so well represented; you are a veritable Othello.

Chav. Not at all. In what way am I jealous?

M. de L. Your self-love is wounded; you are just like all other husbands.

Chav. Bah! a woman's excuse; they say, "Your self-love is affected," as one would say, "Your humble servant." It is a convenient phrase. The world is very hard on the poor husbands.

M. de L. Not so hard on the men as on the women.

Chav. Indeed? Well, everything is relative. Could women possibly live on the same footing with us? It is absurd on the face of it. There are a thousand things that are serious matters for them and of no importance for men.

M. de L. Yes, caprices, for instance.

Chav. Why not? It is certain that men sometimes indulge in them, and women——

M. de L. As well. Do you think her dress is a talisman which should protect her from them?

Chav. It is a barrier which ought to stop them.

M. de L. But it should not be a veil to cover them. But I hear some one in the hall. It is Mathilde returning.

Chav. Oh! no, it is not yet midnight.

[*A servant enters and hands M. de Chavigny a little package*].

What is this?

Servant. It was just left for monsieur the count.

[*Exit servant. Chavigny unwraps the package, which contains Mathilde's purse.*]

M. de L. Another present? And at this hour? Well, this is becoming interesting.

Chav. What the devil does this mean? Here, Francois! who brought this package?

Servant. [*Returning*]. Monsieur?

Chav. Who brought this package?

Servant. Monsieur, it was the porter.

Chav. Was there no letter with it?

Servant. No, monsieur.

Chav. How long was this package in the porter's possession?

Servant. He brought it up as soon as he received it.

Chav. Who gave it to him?

Servant. Monsieur, he does not know.

Chav. He does not know? Curse your stupidity! Was it a man or a woman?

Servant. It was a servant in livery, but he did not know him.

Chav. Is that servant below?

Servant. No, monsieur; he left immediately.

Chav. Did he leave no word?

Servant. No, monsieur.

Chav. That will do.

[*Exit servant.*]

M. de L. I fear you will be spoiled, M. de Chavigny. If you lose your money, it is not the fault of the ladies.

Chav. Hanged if I understand it.

M. de L. How innocent!

Chav. No, I give you my word of honor, I have no idea who has honored me. There must be some mistake about it.

M. de L. Is there an address on the package?

Chav. Why, that is so; I forgot that. Ah! the handwriting is very familiar.

M. de L. May I see it?

Chav. It may be indiscreet in me to show it to you, but so much the worse for the fair donor. I have certainly seen that handwriting somewhere.

M. de L. And I, too.

Chav. Let me see—— No, I am mistaken.

M. de L. It is the English style. See how small the letters are! Oh! that lady is well educated.

Chav. You seem to recognize it.

M. de L. [*With feigned confusion*]. I? Not at all.

[*Chavigny looks at her with astonishment, then continues to pace up and down the room*].

Where were we in our conversation? Oh! yes, we were speaking of caprice. That little red trinket comes quite apropos.

Chav. You are in the secret. Come, confess.

M. de L. Some people are so stupid; if I were you, I would have guessed by this time.

Chav. Come, be frank; tell me who it is.

M. de L. I am quite certain it is Madame de Blainville.

Chav. You are merciless, madam; we shall quarrel if you are not careful.

M. de L. I think we shall; but not this time.

Chav. Will you help me solve this enigma?

M. de L. A fine occupation for me! Let us drop the subject; you may think it over before you go to sleep, but you are too polite to discuss it now.

Chav. Is there any more tea? I would like to have some.

M. de L. I shall make some for you; am I not kind?

[*Silence.*]

Chav. [*Still pacing up and down*]. The more I think about it, the less I know.

M. de L. Ah! there you go again! Did we not agree to drop the subject?

Chav. It must have fallen from the clouds.

M. de L. I tell you it is from Madame de Blainville. After reflecting on the color of her first purse, she decided to send you another by way of repentance. Or, better still, she wants to try you and see whether you will carry this one or the one you know came from her.

Chav. I shall carry this one, of course. That is the only way I can find out who sent it.

M. de L. I do not understand; you are too deep for me.

Chav. I suppose that the one who sent it to me may see it in my hand to-morrow; is that not possible?

M. de L. [*Bursting out laughing*]. Oh! that is too rich; I can not contain myself.

Chav. Perhaps you sent it yourself?

[*Silence.*]

M. de L. Here is your tea, made by my own white hand, and I will wager it is better than that decoction you offered me. But why do you keep looking at me? Do you take me for an anonymous letter?

Chav. It is some joke of yours. There is some dark plot in all this.

M. de L. Yes, both the plot and the purse are well knitted together.

Chav. Confess that you are one of the conspirators.

M. de L. No.

Chav. I beg of you, confess.

M. de L. Not a word.

Chav. Please do.

M. de L. Get down on your knees, and I will speak.

Chav. On my knees? Certainly, if you demand it.

M. de L. Come, let me see you.

Chav. Do you mean it?

[*He laughingly kneels before Madame de L ry.*]

M. de L. [*Dryly*]. I like that attitude, it is so becoming; but I advise you to rise before I become too much affected.

Chav. [*Rising*]. So you refuse to speak?

M. de L. Have you your blue purse?

Chav. I do not know; I think so.

M. de L. I think so, too. Give it to me, and I will tell you who made the other.

Chav. You know then?

M. de L. Yes, I know.

Chav. Is it a woman?

M. de L. It is not a man.

Chav. I mean, is she pretty?

M. de L. She is a woman whom you consider one of the most beautiful in Paris.

Chav. Blond or brunette?

M. de L. Blond.

Chav. What is the first letter in her name?

M. de L. You refuse to accept my bargain then? Give me Madame de Blainville's purse.

Chav. Is she large or small?

M. de L. Give me the purse.

Chav. Just tell me whether she has a small foot.

M. de L. Your purse or your life!

Chav. But will you tell me her name if I give you the purse?

M. de L. Yes.

Chav. [*Drawing the blue purse from his pocket*].
Your word of honor.

M. de L. My word of honor.

[*Chavigny pretends to hesitate; Madame de Léry holds out her hand and he looks at it intently. Suddenly he sits down beside her.*]

Chav. Let us talk about caprices. You confess then that women have them? Now, it may happen that a married man has two ways of thinking, and, within certain limits, two ways of acting.

M. de L. Yes, but that bargain? Have you forgotten it? I am ready to keep my part of it.

Chav. A married man is none the less a man; the marriage ceremony does not metamorphose him, but it sometimes compels him to play a rôle, to speak his lines, as it were. All one needs to know when he is addressed by anyone, is whether the speaker addresses him as a person or a personage, whether his reply is to be sincere or conventional.

M. de L. I understand by that that it is a matter of choice; but how is the public to know how to choose correctly?

Chav. I do not think an intelligent public would find that difficult.

M. de L. You do not care to hear that name then? Come, give me that purse.

Chav. An intelligent woman, for instance (an intelligent woman knows so much!), ought not to be deceived as to the true character of those she meets; she ought to see through conventionalities at a glance.

M. de L. So you have decided to keep your purse?

Chav. It seems to me you value it very highly. A woman of intelligence, madam, ought to know how to put herself in her husband's place. But where are your flowers?

M. de L. Oh! they were falling out all the time, so I took them off. Heavens! my hair is falling down now.

[*She rises and arranges her hair before the glass.*]

Chav. You have as pretty a form as one could wish to see. An intelligent woman like you——

M. de L. An intelligent woman like me goes to the devil when she has to do with an intelligent man like you.

Chav. Well, so far as that is concerned, I am not such a bad sort of devil.

M. de L. You are not good enough for me.

Chav. Then it is because some rival wrongs me.

M. de L. What do you mean by that?

Chav. I mean that if I displease you, it is because some one prevents me from pleasing you.

M. de L. That is modest and polite; but you are mistaken; I care for no one, and no one cares for me.

Chav. At your age and with such eyes? I can not believe it.

M. de L. And yet it is true.

Chav. If I should believe it, I would have a poor opinion of men.

M. de L. I can easily convince you. My vanity will brook no master.

Chav. Will it not accept a vassal?

M. de L. Bah! kings or vassals, you are all tyrants.

Chav. That is true, and I confess that I have always despised such tyranny. I do not know why men impose on women terms which they are under no obligations to accept.

M. de L. Is that your sincere opinion?

Chav. It is; I do not understand why men should abuse privileges which are frankly conceded.

M. de L. Nevertheless, that is the fact.

Chav. Yes, I admit it; if men had more common sense, women would not be so prudent.

M. de L. Possibly; liaisons have come to be veritable marriages, and when it is a matter of setting the wedding day, one may well hesitate.

Chav. You are perfectly right; and tell me why is it thus? Why so much simulation and so little frankness? How can a pretty woman make proper distinctions? Men are fools.

M. de L. So it would seem.

Chav. But let us suppose, for instance, that there is a man who is incapable of such stupidity; let us suppose that an occasion presents itself when it is possible to be frank without danger, without reserve, without fear of the consequences.

[*He takes her hand*].

Let us suppose he says to a woman: "We are alone; you are young and beautiful, and I appreciate your qualities of mind and heart at their true worth. A thousand obstacles stand in the way of our union; a thousand sorrows await us, if we meet again on the morrow. Your pride will accept no yoke, your prudence no bond; you

shall have neither the one nor the other." He asks of you neither protestation nor pledge nor sacrifice, nothing but a smile from those rosy lips, a glance from those beautiful eyes. He tells you that your liberty is on the sill of that door; you resume it immediately upon leaving the room; you are not offered pleasure without love, but love without sacrifice and bitterness; it is merely the caprice we were just talking about, not the blind caprice of the senses, but that of the heart, born of a glance, but as eternal as memory.

M. de L. You were speaking of comedy just now, but it appears that on occasion you can be serious enough. But I wish to indulge in a little caprice myself by way of replying to your elaborate argument. Have you a pack of cards here?

Chav. Yes, on that table; what do you want of them?

M. de L. Give them to me; I have a little object lesson in store for you.

[She takes a card from the pack].

Come, Count, red or black?

Chav. But tell me, what is the stake?

M. de L. The stake is a discretion.*

Chav. Very well—I say red.

M. de L. It is the jack of spades; you have lost. Give me that blue purse.

Chav. With all my heart; but I keep the red, and, although it is the color on which I lost, I shall never upbraid it, for I know as well as you what hand fashioned it.

M. de L. Is it large or small?

*A discretion is a wager which obliges the loser to give to the winner whatever may be demanded at his or her discretion.

Chav. It is charming and soft as satin.

M. de L. Allow me to give vent to my jealousy, then.

[She throws the blue purse into the fire.]

Chav. Ernestine, I adore you!

M. de L. *[Watching the purse as it falls to ashes; she then approaches Chavigny and replies with tenderness].* Then you no longer love Madame de Blainville?

Chav. Ah, no! I have never loved her.

M. de L. Nor I, M. de Chavigny.

Chav. But who told you that I was thinking of that woman? Ah! she is not the woman to make me happy.

M. de L. Nor I either, M. de Chavigny. You have just made a little sacrifice for me; that was very gallant in you, but I do not wish to deceive you; the red purse is none of my work.

Chav. Is it possible? Then who did make it?

M. de L. A hand more beautiful than mine. Do me the favor to reflect a moment and explain this riddle for me. You have just made in good French a most amorous declaration; you have kneeled before me, and there is no carpet on the floor; I asked for the blue purse, and you allowed me to throw it into the fire. Who am I, pray, to merit all that? What do you find in me that is so remarkable? I am not so bad, it is true; I am young, I have a small foot. But, in a word, such creatures as I are not rare. If we had proved to each other's satisfaction that I was a coquette and you a libertine, merely because it is midnight and we are alone, what a fine exploit

we would have with which to decorate a page in our memoirs? And yet that is all there is to it, is it not? And what you smilingly grant me, that favor that costs you not one regret, that insignificant sacrifice you make to a caprice more insignificant still, you refuse the only woman who loves you, the only woman you love!

Chav. But, madam, how do you know all this?

M. de L. Not so loud, if you please; for I hear some one coming. I have not time to point my moral; you have a heart, let it speak. If you find that Mathilde's eyes are red, dry, her tears on this little purse which those tears have already bedewed, for it is your good, brave and faithful wife who spent fifteen days making it. Adieu! You may be angry with me to-day, but to-morrow you will value my friendship and that will be better than yielding to a caprice. But here is Mathilde; together you will forget that there is anyone else in the world. And Mathilde shall never know it.

[Mathilde enters; Madame de L ry goes to meet her and kisses her; M. de Chavigny watches them, then approaches, takes Madame de L ry's flowers from his wife's hair and returns them to the former.]

Chav. I beg your pardon, madam, she shall know it, and I will never forget that a young cur  can preach the best of sermons.

ONE CAN NOT THINK OF EVERYTHING

COMEDY IN ONE ACT

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

THE MARQUIS DE VALBERG.

THE BARON.

GERMAIN.

THE COUNTESS DE VERNON.

VICTOIRE—*Maid to the Countess.*

Scene—The Country.

ONE CAN NOT THINK OF EVERYTHING

SCENE I

The Baron. Germain.

Baron. Ny nephew, you say, is not here?

Germain. No, monsieur, I have searched everywhere.

Baron. Is it possible? It is just five o'clock. Are we not at the countess'?

Ger. Yes, monsieur, here is her piano.

Baron. Is my nephew in love with her?

Ger. Yes, monsieur, it is true.

Baron. Does he come to see her everyday?

Ger. Monsieur, he does nothing else.

Baron. Has he not received my letter?

Ger. This very morning.

Baron. Then he must be in this chateau, since he is not at home. I have notified him that I intended to leave Paris at a quarter past one, and would consequently arrive at Montgeron at three o'clock. From Montgeron to this point is just two and one-half leagues. Two and one-half

leagues in two hours, supposing the roads were bad, which, all things considered, they are not.

Ger. On the contrary, they are very good.

Baron. Setting out from Montgeron at three, I ought to reach the tavern at quarter past four. I called on M. Duplessis, which took me perhaps fifteen minutes. Then allowing sufficient time to make the distance, I should reach this point by five o'clock. Then it must be just five now. Is my calculation correct?

Ger. Quite correct, monsieur, but my master is not here.

Baron. Has his baggage arrived?

Ger. What baggage, if you please?

Baron. His trunks; are they not ready packed down there at his chateau?

Ger. I do not know.

Baron. Why, I notified him that the grand-duchess was in confinement, the grandduchess of Saxe-Gotha, Germain; that is no small affair.

Ger. No, it is not.

Baron. I wrote him that M. Despres visited me day before yesterday, M. Despres from Saint Cloud. He came to notify me that the ministry desired my presence at its meeting on the following day, that is, yesterday. I was about to obey that order when I was advised that the ministers had accompanied the king to Compiègne. So I started for Compiègne, as I knew there was no time to lose. The minister was out hunting. I was directed to go to M. de Ger-court, who secretly conducted me to his private apartments; the king had set out for Fontainebleau.

Ger. That was unfortunate.

Baron. Not at all. I merely recount that experience as a proof that I am always punctual.

Ger. Oh! yes, you are right.

Baron. Punctuality is one of the rarest qualities, and yet, one might say that it lies at the base of, that it is the key to all others. For just as the most beautiful music, the finest eloquence, might fail to please under certain unfavorable conditions, so rarest virtues and most gracious deeds are significant only as they are the product of the occasion which requires them. Remember, Germain, that nothing is more pitiful than an ill-timed arrival, no matter how great the merit which would seem to excuse it; for instance, that celebrated diplomat, who arrived too late at the deathbed of his prince, and found the queen doing up her hair in curl papers. Thus the effect of the most brilliant talents is lost, and the glory of war as well as the renown of statecraft has often been sacrificed to the caprice of a time-piece. Is your watch well regulated, my friend?

Ger. I set it every hour, monsieur.

Baron. Good. Well, you should know that, having encountered the Marquis de Morivaux, who gave me a place in his carriage, I learned that the minister had returned to Paris. His Excellency received me at half past two, and informed me that the grandduchess of Gotha was in confinement, and that the king had chosen me and my nephew to go and present his congratulations.

Ger. At Gotha, monsieur?.

Baron. At Gotha. It is a great honor for your master.

Ger. Yes, monsieur, but he is not here.

Baron. That is what I do not understand. Is he always so thoughtless?

Ger. No, monsieur not always. He does not forget, he thinks of something else..

Baron. We must start for Germany without fail to-morrow morning. He has given no orders to prepare for his departure?

Ger. No, monsieur. This morning, before going out, he opened a large trunk.

Baron. And what did he put in it?

Ger. A piece of music.

Baron. A piece of music!

Ger. Yes, monsieur; then he closed the trunk very carefully, locked it, and put the key in his pocket.

Baron. A piece of music! Another piece of folly! If the king knew of these whims he would not dare confide to him a mission of such importance as this. Happily he will be under my care. Well, what did he say, what did he do?

Ger. He sung, monsieur, he sung all day long.

Baron. He sung?

Ger. Beautifully, monsieur; it was a pleasure to listen to him.

Baron. A fine prelude for an ambassador! You have some sense, Germain. Tell me frankly, do you think him capable of conducting himself properly in such a delicate matter?

Ger. What, monsieur! As going to Gotha to make his little bow to a woman in confinement? Why, I could do that myself.

Baron. You do not know what you are talking about.

Ger. About the grandduchess, monsieur; you just told me she was in confinement.

Baron. It is true, she has announced the day when a new bud will appear on an illustrious branch. But what can my nephew be doing?

Ger. He comes here very frequently to see madame the countess.

Baron. And where is the countess?

Ger. Monsieur she has not yet risen.

Baron. At this hour? She does not dine, then?

Ger. No, monsieur, she sups.

Baron. Another rattle-brain. Nice neighborhood for a fool.

Ger. My master would be angry, monsieur, if he should hear anyone talk about him in that way. When anyone dares criticise his course or make the slightest aspersion on his character, his wrath is something terrible. Why, the other day he almost beat me to death because he put tobacco on his berries instead of sugar, and just yesterday —

Baron. Heavens! Is it possible that a man of his ability (and my nephew is a distinguished man) can be guilty of such deplorable, such puerile acts as those?

Ger. It is very sad, monsieur.

Baron. Have I not with my own eyes seen him go through a royal quadrille with his hands in his pockets, and walk through the throng of dancers as though he were in his own garden?

Ger. *Parbleu!* monsieur, he did that very thing the other evening at the countess'. There

was a large company, and M. Vertigo, the poet, was reading a melodrama in verse. At the most pathetic part, monsieur, when the young lady who had been poisoned had just recognized her father as her murderer, when all the ladies were melting into tears, what did my master do but leave his seat and take a drink of water from the glass the author had placed on a table before him. The entire scene was spoiled.

Baron. I am not at all surprised. I remember when he put thirty sous in a cup of tea which he offered a certain charming lady, thinking she would take them for the poor.

Ger. Last winter you were absent at the time of his brother's marriage. He was to do the honors at the wedding supper. Toward evening I went to his room to help him dress for the occasion. He sent me away, took off all his clothes and began to pace up and down the room in his gown; suddenly he stopped short, looked at himself in the glass with astonishment. "What the devil am I doing?" he murmured. "It is night, and I should go to bed." With that he got into bed, forgetting all about the wedding feast.

Baron. And do you think such an erratic fellow is fit to go to Gotha? See what a task I have undertaken, Germain, for the will of the king must be accomplished. I need not say that my nephew has the title, that I merely accompany him. His father's name was greater than mine; so he has the honor and I the responsibility.

Ger. But my master has merits.

Baron. Certainly, but is that enough? He has promised me to correct his faults.

Ger. He tries to do so, monsieur; but he can not help going by contraries. But here he comes.

SCENE II

The Baron, Germain, the Marquis.

Marquis. Ah! then it is a wager? Will some one always contrive to steal my papers?

Ger. Monsieur, here is the baron.

Mar. You rogue, what have you done with that piece of music I value so highly? Where is it? Where have you put it?

Baron. Good day, Valberg; how are you to-day?

Mar. I will clear my house one of these days; I will put you out of doors.

[*To the Baron, who is laughing*].

And you, you grinning knave, will be the first to go.

Ger. Monsieur, that is the baron.

Mar. Ah! pardon me, my dear uncle, you come from Paris? You see, I have lost a roll of music.

Baron. You see, my nephew, that I am punctual; I have arrived at the hour I set. Are you ready to start?

Mar. To start?

Baron. Yes, to-morrow morning.

Mar. Yes, I swear that if I am refused, I shall go away at once, and you will never see me again.

Baron. What refusal do you speak of? What do you mean?

Mar. Upon my honor, if I am coldly received, if my proposal is treated with disdain, my decision is taken.

Baron. Eh! coldly received by whom? What have you to fear, coming, as you do, from the king?

Mar. Does the king meddle with this?

Baron. Apparently, since you are to convey an autograph letter from his majesty.

Mar. For the countess?

Baron. For the grand-duchess. Have you forgotten that you have been commissioned?

Mar. Oh! yes; I was thinking of a letter I am going to write to the countess. Have you seen her?

Baron. No, she sleeps.

Mar. Very well. What do you think of that affair? Am I not right?

Baron. What affair?

Mar. Oh! I know what you will say. You will never admit that I am right; you have quarrelled with me and brought suit to recover a miserable quarter of a vineyard; the matter is now before parliament. I will wager that the law will be rejected.

Baron. What are you talking about? Serious matters should receive all your attention.

Mar. If that is the case, you have only to speak; I am all attention.

Baron. You have read that letter I sent you about the embassy to Gotha?

Mar. The embassy? Certainly, I am always at the king's service.

Baron. Very good.

Mar. His majesty knows my devotion.

Baron. Certainly. You will be ready then?

Mar. Can you doubt it? I have given my orders; Germain, is everything ready?

Ger. Monsieur, I have received no orders.

Mar. What's that, you knave? Did I not tell you to place that large trunk in the middle of the room?

Ger. Yes, if perchance monsieur merely wishes to sing on the way——

Mar. To sing on the way, impertinent!

Ger. Yes, monsieur, for there is nothing in the trunk, but your roll of music, and you have the key in your pocket.

Mar. In my—— Why so it is. It must have been handed me with my gloves or my handkerchief. These servants here serve me villainously.

Ger. I assure you, monsieur——

Baron. Not a word! Leave us and go prepare everything for our journey.

[*Exit Germain*].

Now, Valberg, I must leave you to return to M. Duplessis to get letters from the court. I have just two words to say to you; first, our journey to Gotha is no ordinary mission; and second, the manner in which you conduct yourself in this important matter will largely determine your future.

Mar. Alas! I am but too well aware of it.

Baron. Therefore I want you to promise me to make an effort to overcome that tendency to distraction, that absent-mindedness that results in so many embarrassing situations.

Mar. Oh! as for that, I cheerfully give you my word.

Baron. Seriously?

Mar. Seriously.

Baron. Then go and see that your orders are executed. It is twenty minutes of six. I am going to M. Duplessis; it is not far; I shall return for dinner. Come, do you promise to follow my advice in all things? You know how important a matter is form in these court ceremonies.

Mar. Oh! do not trouble yourself about that. I know just how to go through these things. I write everything down. But I must know the name of the judge-advocate, and I will see him myself.

Baron. I have nothing to do with a judge-advocate; what do you mean?

Mar. If you have no judge-advocate, you can not go on with your case.

Baron. But I have no case.

Mar. What! Did you not just now say something about court?

Baron. I was speaking of the court of Saxony.

Mar. Ah! then you had reference to our embassy—— I am somewhat preoccupied; the countess has a suit at court, and I am looking after it. She is a charming woman!

Baron. Yes, yes, everyone knows you are infatuated with her, but do not let that interfere with our plans, if you please.

Mar. Have no fears on that point. When I am not thinking, I may appear a little heedless; but when I take hold of serious matters, no one is more attentive than I.

Baron. Good!

Mar. You may go to M. Duplessis, and be assured that I will attend to everything in your absence.

Baron. We shall see.

Mar. I shall watch Germain for fear he will make some mistake.

Baron. That is right.

Mar. And then I shall finish putting my papers in order. I have much to do.

Baron. Do not delay then, I beg of you.

Mar. Not a moment. Go, monsieur, I shall write to my mother while you are gone;—it is only right that I should thank the minister; I shall leave my dogs with Madame Belleruche; I shall notify all my relatives, and by the time you return I hope the marriage will be decided upon.

Baron. [*Stopping short as he is about to leave the room*]. The marriage! What marriage?

Mar. Why, mine, of course. Did I not tell you about it?

Baron. What is all this about? Your marriage, did you say?

Mar. Yes, with the countess; did I not tell you that I am going to marry her?

Baron. No, you did not.

Mar. So I have many things to attend to, as you see.

Baron. But one does not marry on the eve of an important journey; you mean that you intend to marry on your return.

Mar. No, my fate is to be decided to-day.

Baron. Do not think of it, my friend.

Mar. I am thinking of it very seriously, for I shall not leave this spot until I have the countess' final answer.

Baron. But whether that answer is favorable or unfavorable, what has that to do with our embassy? You do not intend to take the countess with you, do you?

Mar. Why not, if she consents?

Baron. Heavens! a woman traveling! Hats, dresses, maids, a shower of boxes, nights at an inn, screams over a broken carriage——

Mar. Mere bagatelles.

Baron. Comfort is not a bagatelle. In my letters of instruction there is nothing said about a woman, and I do not know how the king would take it.

Mar. I care very little for that.

Baron. But I care a great deal, and if you insist, I tell you——

[*The marquis sits down at the piano and begins to play. Aside.*]

Truly, that fellow is a fool; it is impossible for him to go to Gotha. What shall I do? I can not go alone, his name is clearly mentioned in the royal letter. If I should attempt to explain why he did not go, there would be a scandal, and if I should have my name put in the place of his (which I would be justified in doing), the delay would cause the whole thing to fail.

[*Some one rings.*]

Heavens! it is the countess—— I shall be too late for M. Duplessis. My nephew, kindly listen to me.

Mar. Why, I thought you had gone.

Baron. You are in love with the countess.

Mar. That is my secret.

Baron. You have told me so.

Mar. If I have allowed you to surmise it, I will not deny it.

Baron. No joking, I beg of you, I can not help you any with the countess; she detests me, and I am pressed for time. Here is what I propose. Two things have an important bearing upon your future; your marriage and your embassy. Do not sacrifice one to the other.

Mar. Certainly not,

Baron. See the countess, obtain her reply. If she accepts, I do not object to her going to Germany, but, of course, she could not go with us.

Mar. Of course not.

Baron. But she could meet you there.

Mar. That is an excellent idea.

Baron. And if she refuses——

Mar. If she refuses, I leave her forever.

Baron. That is right, for she would prove herself an ingrate.

Mar. But I should continue to adore her!

Baron. Certainly.

[*Aside*].

He is not such a bad fellow, and even his eccentricities may be turned to his profit. But he must be managed. Yes, he will do to go to Gotha.

[*Aloud*].

Well, it is agreed; I leave you. Upon my return your success will, I hope, be assured, for the countess is evidently expecting a declaration from you.

Mar. I am not so sure of that, for several times I have been on the point of speaking to her, when something or other has come up and

made me forget all about it; but this time I have placed a piece of paper in my pocket to remind me of it.

Baron. You are making fine progress!

Mar. I do not know that she will consent, for it is difficult to fix her attention for any length of time on one subject. When you speak to her she seems to listen, when the fact is she is a hundred miles away.

Baron. Perhaps she is absent-minded.

Mar. Yes, that is it, absent-minded. It is unendurable.

Baron. You are right.—But I must be off to see M. Duplessis.

Mar. Yes, you will do well, for that wedding, the law suit and the embassy give me much to do. I have a thousand letters to answer. She wants me to read a new story with her—All those things can not be done at once, you know.

Baron. Yes, yes, think of your marriage.

[*Aside, as he turns to leave the room*].

He says he is going to watch Germain, but I shall get Germain to watch him.

SCENE III

The Marquis. Victoire.

Mar. Hello! Where are the servants?

Victoire. What does monsieur wish?

Mar. Give me my dressing-gown.

Vic. You surely do not mean it, monsieur.

Mar. Why, yes, certainly,

Vic. The countess has been told that you are here, and she will soon see you.

Mar. Why should she do that? I will order my horses and go to her.

Vic. But, monsieur, you are already in her house.

Mar. You are right—— That is what I thought——

Vic. Monsieur, here is the countess.

SCENE IV

The Countess, the Marquis, Victoire.

Countess. François, tell Victoire to come here.

Vic. Here I am, madame.

Countess. Good—— Monsieur de Valberg, I am delighted to see you—— Yesterday you were in such an interesting state of distraction——I like you that way.

Mar. That is not the way to correct me, madame; quite the contrary. And yet, it is said that contraries attract each other.

Countess. Mademoiselle, my dress.

Vic. Yes, madame.

Countess. Give me another collar.

[*She sits down before her toilet table*].

This is hideous.

[*To the Marquis*].

Be seated.

Vic. Madame shall have another, if she does not like that, but it is very pretty. There is a wrinkle here—let me fix it.

[*She arranges the collar.*]

Countess. There, that is it.

[*She examines it in the glass.*]

That is better. Tell Madame Dufour to make another collar just like that, do you hear?

Vic. Yes, madam; when do you wish to have it?

Countess. When? To-morrow morning. There is no one to send but François, and I am in a great hurry.

Vic. I fear there will not be time.

Countess. Oh! yes, you always find it impossible to obey my orders, and still you claim to be very much attached to me.

Vic. That is the truth—— Madame is angry.

Countess. Give me the rouge. Well, Monsieur de Valberg, you do not seem to be inclined to talk to-day.

Mar. But you do not listen to me, madame.

Countess. [*Arranging a ribbon*]. Pardon me, I beg of you. You were speaking of contraries, were you not?

Mar. Contraries? Contracts, was it not?

Countess. Possibly. Victoire!

Vic. Madame.

Countess. I do not know what you can have to say about contracts.

Mar. Ah! I will tell you, madame, when you will listen to me.

Countess. I listen with pleasure.

Mar. Do you receive company to-day?

Countess. No, if you prefer not. These tiresome people from the village who take my park

for a promenade, annoy me. Victoire, admit no one.

Vic. Yes, madame.

Mar. I am obliged to you, for I have something of a very serious nature to impart.

Countess. [*To Victoire*]. My sister-in-law, of course, is an exception.

Vic. Yes, madame.

Countess. She dotes upon you, Monsieur de Valberg.

Mar. And I think her charming! There are some women who please from the very first glance.

Countess. Victoire, you may also admit M. de Clairvaux.

Vic. Is that all?

Mar. Ah! madame, M. de Latour also, I beg of you.

Countess. M. de Latour? Very well, yes, M. de Latour.

Vic. Yes, madame.

Countess. Wait—— Yesterday's list of callers.

Vic. But madame received everybody yesterday.

Countess. Do you think so?

Vic. I am sure of it.

Countess. Very well, in that case I shall receive everybody to-day.

Vic. Will madame have need of me?

Countess. No, but do not go far away. Let me know when my purchases arrive.

SCENE V

The Marquis. The Countess.

Mar. You have been making some purchases?

Countess. Yes, for the winter.

Mar. You are fond of society, madame?

Countess. Certainly, above all things. You know how unhappy my husband made me when he shut me up for three years on one of his estates.

Mar. On one of his estates?

Countess. Yes, all the time except a tour down the Rhine.

Mar. The Rhine?

Countess. Yes.

Mar. Is the scenery fine?

Countess. I am sure I don't know; I did not look at it. Travelling is so unpleasant, and I do not see any difference between the various points of interest. The faculty of appreciation has been denied me. Chateaux, forests, rivers, especially churches, were everywhere pointed out to me. Those gothic churches make me shiver! I still dream about the time when, after a long day's riding in a carriage, Vernon entered my room with a picture of a cathedral. I was just sick of them.

Mar. That must have been very painful.

Countess. And then it was not enough to enter those damp, cave like structures and break one's neck looking up at gothic arches; my husband's particular joy was to climb up to the

spires, and haul me up after him. You know what hard work that is. One winds up a tortuous stairway, higher and higher until one's head feels as though it was being pierced by a corkscrew, and the eyes close tight with terror. At that interesting moment your guide hands you a glass and asks you to admire the view! That is the way I saw Germany.

Mar. And yet that is the route we are going to take with the baron.

Countess. The baron? Is he here?

Mar. Yes, madame, he has just arrived. He came from Paris with that violent storm—that is what has spoiled our fine weather, surely.

Countess. [*Laughing*]. The arrival of the baron? That is good!

Mar. Were you not speaking of him?

Countess. [*Laughing*]. Yes, of course.

Mar. I sometimes make mistakes, and it is very annoying.

Countess. Oh! no—— I enjoy it, I assure you.

[*She begins to search for something.*]

Mar. What are you looking for? Tobacco? I have some right here.

[*He opens his tobacco box*].

Ah! I had nearly forgotten.

Countess. What?

Mar. This paper here. Guess.

Countess. I am not good at guessing; tell me at once.

Mar. Why, if you wish to remarry——

Countess. [*Searching about on the piano*]. Well?

Mar. What are you looking for?

Countess. [*Still searching*]. Pray continue.

Mar. You will be the happiest woman in the world with me.

Countess. [*Continuing her search*]. With you?

Mar. Oh surely.

Countess. I do not find it, where can it be?

Mar. What are you looking for?

Countess. A paper I left here just a moment ago.

Mar. Is it anything valuable?

Countess. Yes and no; it is a song.

Mar. I have a collection; if you care for it, I will loan it to you. It is very complete, since 1650.

Countess. It was a new song.

Mar. There are a great many in my collection.

Countess. New songs?

Mar. Yes, for that time.

Countess. [*Laughing*]. For 1650! Ha! ha! You are always the same.

Mar. Yes, I am constant. That does not always succeed, as you know, with the ladies.

Countess. And do you complain of the ladies?

Mar. Ah! if you would consent to be mine—Here is a visitor.

Countess. It is your servant.

SCENE VI

The Countess, the Marquis, Germain.

Ger. Pardon me, madame, I have brought

my master a paper from the baron.

Mar. Indeed! what is it? Ah! madame, that is strange, but here is the very romanza I was thinking about. Is this what you were looking for?

Countess. Let me see; yes, this seems to be the very one; you must have stolen it.

[*She sits down at the piano and plays.*]

Ger. [*Aside*]. I found it in the trunk.

[*To the marquis*].

Monsieur, the baron told me to ask you——

Mar. What is that? The baron?

Ger. If you were attending to your affairs.

Mar. Yes, and you have just upset them.

Ger. The baron has just received unpleasant news from Fontainebleau. He has returned to M. Duplessis, and appears much disturbed.

Mar. Indeed?

Ger. Yes, I brought you that music so as to have an excuse for speaking to you; he wishes to have your reply at once.

Mar. [*Reflecting*]. You have done well. But it seems to me, madame, you are mistaken; that is not the one.

[*He goes to the piano.*]

Countess. I think it is. Just wait a minute.

[*She plays.*]

Ger. It seems to me they are not making much progress. The baron asked me to catch some words of their conversation.

[*He retires slowly.*]

Countess. You see how it goes.

Mar. Yes, but the words——

Countess. I do not care for the words.

Mar. The words are something like this:

[*He sings*].

"Fanny, happy the mortal who breathes——"

Ger. [*Near the door*]. That is not the road to Gotha.

Mar. I have forgotten the rest, strange to say.

Countess. Very strange, with your memory!

Mar. Yes, I can generally remember when I try.

SCENE VII

Countess, Marquis, Germain, Victoire.

Vic. The purchases have come, madame.

Countess. Good.

Mar. Some one to see you? Do not let me detain you.

Countess. Will you not come with me? You can give me the benefit of your advice.

Mar. No, I must see some one on business.

Countess. Here, in my house?

Mar. Yes, it is you, by the way.

Countess. I?

Mar. Yes, did I not tell you about it?

Countess. What?

Mar. That I desire to marry you.

Countess. I do not know when.

Mar. Just this moment; I came here for that special purpose.

Countess. I do not remember it.

Mar. What could you have been thinking of? Your distractions are most bewildering. Yet it seems so me——

Countess. Yes?

Mar. That I spoke of my journey.

Countess. What journey?

Mar. To Germany.

Countess. No, it was I who spoke of mine.

Mar. What do you mean?

Countess. Why, my tour down the Rhine with my husband.

Mar. I beg your pardon——

Countess. Come, see my purchases.

Mar. [*On the way out*]. But I——

Countess. [*The same*]. But I tell you——

SCENE VIII

Germain, Victoire.

Ger. Mam'selle Victoire, what do you say to that? You know that he loves her.

Vic. And I know that she loves him.

Ger. And that he wishes to marry her.

Vic. And that she asks nothing better.

Ger. Are you sure of it?

Vic. Perfectly.

Ger. But you do not know that we are going on an embassy.

Vic. Where?

Ger. To Gotha. It appears that the duchess is in confinement, and we are going to congratulate her for his majesty.

Vic. What has that to do with it?

Ger. This: My master is anxious to have the

countess say yes or no before his departure, so as to get the matter off his mind. We are to set out to-morrow morning with the baron, and it would take but a word to decide everything; instead of saying that word, they spend their time singing.

Vic. However, he has spoken about traveling and marriage.

Ger. And she replies with a song.

Vic. Why does not your baron come to the rescue.

Ger. For fear of spoiling everything, as he thinks your mistress does not like him.

Vic. Monsieur Germain.

Cer. Mam'selle Victoire.

Vic. Our masters are big children; we must help them out. You brought a paper, did you not?

Ger. Yes, a piece of music.

Vic. Give it to me, and now——

[She writes on the sheet of music.]

Ger. What are you writing there?

Vic. Never mind. Put this on the piano.

Ger. *[Reading]*. But they will be angry.

Vic. Never fear. She dreams of him all day long, and what is more——

Ger. Here they come! Let us fly!

Vic. And listen!

SCENE IX

The Countess, the Marquis.

Countess. Do you like my red silk?

Mar. [*Book in hand*]. No, it is not what I would have chosen.

[*Reading*].

"Fanny, happy the mortal who breathes——"

Countess. Now that you have your book in your hand, I suppose you can rely on your memory.

Mar. Oh! I do not rely on the book; it would have come to me sooner or later.

[*Reading*].

"Fanny, happy the mortal who breathes at thy side
The air of sweet innocence. He knows full well
What hosts of the blessed in heaven reside.

Countess. How beautifully you recite!

Mar. It is not difficult, madame, to express what one feels at the bottom of one's heart, and these verses seem to have been written expressly for this moment——

"Fanny, happy the mortal——"

Countess. You find something amusing in those verses.

Mar. No, I swear on my soul and by all that is sacred that I consider them charming.

Countess. Well, come, sing them; I will accompany you.

[*She sits down at the piano*].

Mar. [*At her side*]. You shall see, madame, that I can repeat those lines without the book. What are you thinking about, madame?

Countess. That red silk; you do not like it?

Mar. I prefer that faded-leaf taffeta.

Countess. It is out of date.

Mar. It appeared to be quite new.

Countess. There are some things that are always passé.

Mar. That remark is essentially feminine.

Countess. How feminine?

Mar. You ladies have a mania for the new, for the novel.

Countess. You are polite.

Mar. Outside of the present moment you know nothing. You care nothing for what is old, and you take no thought of the morrow. I assure you that if I were married, my wife should not have so many whims.

Countess. You would make her wear a dress of faded-leaf taffeta?

Mar. Yes, if that happened to suit my taste.

Countess. She would laugh at you and refuse to wear it.

Mar. She would wear it all her life, madame, if she loved me truly.

Countess. If that is your opinion, you will never marry.

Mar. Are you serious, madame?

Countess. Yes, I advise you to give up your search for a victim.

Mar. Oh, heavens! you pronounce my death sentence.

Countess. Why your death sentence?

Mar. I am not like you, madame; it is not necessary to tell me a thing twice. Oh! I fear that word, and, although I foresaw it, I did not expect to hear it. It drives me to despair, it overwhelms me—in heaven's name! do not repeat it.

Countess. Why, what is the matter with you?

Mar. Do you think I can live separated from

you, far from all that is dear to me? Such life would be insupportable. You may laugh as much as you please. I know very well that you will say that a journey undertaken in such haste is always disagreeable; that, if I have my plans, you also have yours. You will find a hundred objections, but how can one count the obstacles in the path of true love? Does your law suit trouble you? I assure you it is as good as won. I have called on your attorney twenty times. He lives at some distance from here, but what does that matter? That is not what troubles you—no, madame, you do not love me.

Countess. I beg your pardon, but what is the meaning of this strange effusion?

Mar. I speak nothing but the exact truth, but, since you do not care to hear it, I shall retire. Adieu, madame.

Countess. You should know, marquis, that your vagaries are amusing only when they are not serious. When you take a neighbor's hat by mistake, or when you call the curé, mademoiselle, no one thinks of getting angry; but all that should not encourage you to lose all your senses and to talk about a taffeta dress as though you were thinking of drowning yourself; for you should know that when it reaches that point, merriment gives place to patience, and patience is something no man should care to demand of a woman; it is woman's mortal enemy.

Mar. That is to say, I have become unfortunate. Another reason why I should go away.

Countess. Truly, you are losing your mind.

Mar. Worse and worse. How unhappy I am!

Countess. Do you not remain to supper?

Mar. No, I am going away—— Adieu, madame.

[He sits down in a corner.]

Countess. By my faith, you may do as you please, for you are unendurable and incomprehensible. Please hand me my music. But what is this?

[She reads in a low voice the words written on the piece of music.]

Mar. *[Seated]*. She whom I love so tenderly! How have I displeased her? What have I done to offend her? I came here with a heart full of love for her, ready to consecrate my life to her; I confess frankly the love I feel for her; I ask for her hand in good faith, and she cruelly repulses me. It is inconceivable! The more I reflect on it the less I understand it.

[He rises and paces up and down the room].

I must have committed some unpardonable sin.

Countess. *[Handing him the paper as he passes before her]*. There, Valberg, read that.

Mar. *[Aside]*. Unpardonable? It can not be. She will surely forgive me. Come, Germain, we must go. Yes, I must see her again. She is so good, so indulgent, so gracious and so beautiful! There is no one comparable to her.

Countess. *[Aside]*. I will wait until this passes off.

Mar. *[Aside]*. Would her habitual absent-mindedness, her vagaries; be such as a reasonable man could endure? Has she that calm presence of mind, that equable temperament

necessary to the proper discharge of household duties? I would have much to teach that woman.

Countess. That is worth listening to.

Mar. But she is such a fine musician!—
Germain!—Ah! how happy we would be, alone in some peaceful retreat, with some friends about us, for I would be sure to love everyone she loves.

Countess. Indeed!

Mar. But no, she loves society and its distractions— Germain!— Very well, I would not be jealous. Who would be jealous of such a woman?— Germain!— I would learn to love those pleasures which bore me; I would take pride in seeing her admired; I would be proud of her as a part of myself, and if she should ever deceive me— Germain!— I would plunge a dagger into her heart.

Countess. [*Taking his hand*]. Oh! no, Monsieur de Valberg.

Mar. Is it you, countess? Heavens! I did not think—

Countess. Before telling me read this.

Mar. What is it?

[*He reads.*]

“The marquis is requested to remember that he is to marry the countess before setting out for Germany.” Very well, madame, you see that it was I and not you who spoke of that journey.

Countess. But is it true, are you going?

Mar. How can you ask? For two hours I have been repeating it over and over.

Countess. You have taken my maid for me, for those lines were written by her.

Mar. Indeed? She writes very well.

Countess. Yes, but she is very impertinent.

Mar. Not at all; that was just what I was thinking about.

Countess. But what are you going to do in Germany?

Mar. Present the king's compliments to the grand-duchess.

Countess. And when do you set out?

Mar. To-morrow morning.

Countess. Then you wish to marry me on the way?

Mar. Yes, I would like to take you with me. What a delightful journey that would make!

Countess. An elopement?

Mar. Yes, in a sense.

Countess. That would be jolly.

Mar. We would publish our bans——

Countess. At each relay. And the witnesses?

Mar. We have my uncle.

Countess. And our relatives?

Mar. They would ask nothing better.

Countess. And the world?

Mar. What could the world say? We are honest people, and we shall not be arrested as rogues merely because we take a carriage and start for Germany.

Countess. Your plan is so absurd, so extravagant, that it amuses me.

Mar. Let us follow it; it is very simple.

Countess. I am almost tempted.

Mar. And I am enchanted. Hello! Germain!

[*Enter Germain.*]

Ger. You called, monsieur?

[*Aside*].

I believe the danger is past.

Mar. Go, quick, get that large trunk in the middle of my room, and bring it here.

Ger. Here, monsieur?

Mar. Yes, make haste.

[*Exit Germain.*]

Countess. [*Laughing*]. Oh! what folly! You have sent him after your trunk?

Mar. Yes, we must get our things ready to pack at once; when one has a good idea, I believe it is best to carry it out at once.

Countess. One moment, marquis; before setting out at full speed for the East Indies, it would be well to get a passport. Are you sure that I am endowed with all those qualities essential to the proper discharge of the household duties in some of your castles in Spain.

Mar. In Spain? I do not understand.

Countess. Have I that calm presence of mind, that equable temperament so desirable in a house the master of which possesses the qualities in such perfection?

Mar. Now, you are joking. Need I repeat to you what all the world knows, that you possess all the desirable qualities, all talents and every grace?

Countess. But you forget that I am a coquette, an idler, particularly that I am absent-minded

Mar. Who says that, madame?

Countess. One of my friends.

Mar. He is an impertinent fellow.

Countess. Not always. He is quite original,

and makes portraits before his mirror which he paints to suit his own fancy. Guess who it is. He is a diplomat and something of a musician; a poet and a connoisseur in silk goods; a dangerous hunter for—his neighbor's hedge; redoubtable at whist—for his partner; an intelligent man, who makes stupid blunders; a gallant man without, a considerate lover, who, to win his lady's heart, pays her compliments by intention and insults by distraction.

Mar. If I have ever done such things, madame, it is for the last time, and you shall see on this journey——

Countess. But have I consented to this journey?

Mar. You have said yes.

Countess. I almost said yes. Between those two words there is a world of difference.

Mar. If you will but consent, madame, that portrait you have just drawn shall no longer resemble me. Yes, if it is a true picture to-day, I protest that is your fault. It was doubt and fear, hope and anxiety, that prevented me from seeing or understanding anything that was not you. Do not do me the injustice of supposing that I would have lost my reason if I had loved you less; I have left it in your eyes; a word from you will restore it.

Countess. What you say leads me to suspect that, without knowing it, we have stolen each other's reason. You are, you say, distracted by your love for me; perhaps I am bewildered by my friendship for you. Do you think we ought mutually to repair the damage we have done? Since I have taken your good sense and you

mine, shall we govern our collective conduct by reciprocal counsel? That would be an excellent method of regaining great wisdom.

Mar. I wish nothing better than to obey you.

Countess. It is not a matter of obedience but of simple exchange. For instance, I am an idler, you say——

Mar. But, madam——

Countess. You said so and I agree with you. While you, on the contrary, are very active; you return from your morning's ride before I am ready to get up; your fingers are always covered with ink and it is very hard for me to write. And with reading it is the same; you devour everything up to tragedies with ferocious appetite, while I sleep through the best of them. In society you hardly know what to do with yourself; you have not a word to say to anyone, you talk to yourself without caring who may hear you; as for me, I confess I love conversation. I enjoy hearing myself talk so much that some people will have nothing to do with me, and while you are off in a corner communing with your inner self, I bask in the glare of the lighted ballroom. Would not all these contrasts make a picture? Find a frame with which to surround it, you with your faded leaf taffeta, I with my red silk, our good qualities above our defects; there we can exchange our rôles, playing now the blind man and now the dog who leads him. Would it not be a fine example to place before the world a man whose love would impel him to renounce his masculine prerogative of command, and a woman sacrificing her cherished tradition of independence?

Mar. You charm me, you transport me. Oh! madame, if I were but worthy to consecrate my life to you, to give my life for you.

Countess. Oh! pray do not do that; what good would that do me?

[*Enter Germain with the trunk.*]

Ger. Here is your trunk, monsieur.

Mar. And my uncle?

Ger. He has not returned from M. Duplessis.'

Mar. Well, madame?

Countess. Well, let us try——

Mar. Quick, Germain, Francois, Victoire; bring everything here.

Countess. Is that the way you express your gratitude?

Mar. Oh! madame, there will be plenty of time for that.

Countess. How plenty of time?

Mar. I shall do nothing else from this day to to the end of my life.

[*Enter Victoire.*]

Vic. Does madame require my services?

Countess. It was you, mademoiselle, who dared——

Mar. Do not scold her. If I had the wealth of Cræsus I would give it to her.

[*He gives her his purse.*]

Countess. Is this that sensible man I have heard so much about?

Mar. Oh! madame, spare me to-day. Put your music right here.

Countess. A good beginning.

Mar. [*Arranging the music.*] Everyone loves music in Germany. We shall find connois-

seurs in that country. I anticipate the pleasure of hearing you sing for them.

[*He sings.*]

"Fanny, happy the mortal."

They will fall in love with you, those fine people—Germain!

Ger. Monsieur?

Mar. Go bring me my violin.

[*Exit Germain.*]

Countess. Do not forget that romanza.

Mar. It shall remind me of the happiest day of my life.

Countess. And my taffeta dress? Victoire!

Victoire. Yes, madame.

[*She brings the dress, Germain the violin a little later.*]

Mar. You wish to take it?

Countess. Yes, since it is one of your conditions.

Mar. Oh! that is how I displeased you. Bring the other, mademoiselle.

[*He throws it on a chair.*]

Countess. Let us not take all of these things along, nothing but what we need; we can buy all sorts of things in Germany.

Mar. Very well—Germain!

Ger. Monsieur.

Mar. My gun and my hunting horn; yes, we can buy the other things at Gotha.

Countess. At Gotha?

Mar. Yes, that is where we are going.

Countess. Here, take this little box.

Mar. What does it contain? Family papers?

[*Examining it.*]

No, it is tea; but we can find that anywhere.

Countess. I do not like any tea but this.

Mar. What a happy time we shall have.

Countess. We will buy German costumes while we are there; they will be just the thing for a masque ball.

Mar. Madame, shall we take my sun-dial with us? It keeps very good time.

Countess. The idea! Valberg, where are all your fine promises?

Mar. You are right; my watch will suffice.

[He puts it in the trunk.]

Countess. I must watch you, now that you have become a diplomat.

Mar. Oh! have no fears, I shall shine in the role.

[He picks up various objects here and there and puts them in the trunk. While talking he throws in his portfolio, his gloves, his handkerchief and his hat.]

I went to Denmark once, and got along very well. My uncle, who thinks he is a genius, tries to instruct me, but he is none too thoughtful himself; between you and me, his mind sometimes wanders.

[Closing the trunk.]

Countess. There!

SCENE X.

The Countess, the Marquis, the Baron, Germain, Victoire.

Baron. Madame, I beg your pardon for entering thus unannounced, but an unforeseen circumstance——

Countess. You are entirely welcome.

Mar. Oh! my dear uncle, embrace me. You may also embrace madame. It is all over, everything is forgotten—I mean everything is settled. You may imagine how happy I am.

Baron. Alas! my nephew, all is lost. The grand-duchess of Gotha is dead.

Mar. That is unfortunate; our trunk is all ready.

Baron. I have just learned the sad news from M. Duplessis,

Countess. What, Valberg, must we give up our journey? I had set my heart on it.

Mar. Just heavens! Do you abandon me?

Countess. No, but take me somewhere.

Mar. To Italy, madame, to Turkey, to Norway if you choose.

Baron. Who could have anticipated such a sad event? All my arrangements had been made; I had the royal letters, the gifts, I had prepared for everything, foreseen everything; this is the only thing I had not counted on!

Mar. Yes, yes; what does the proverb say? "One can not think of everything."

THE END

